NOV.
1965

50¢
PDC

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

Featured Novelets By

BRETT HALLIDAY • JOHN D. MacDONALD

LARRY MADDOCK • JAMES HOLDING • GINA DESSART

JAMES O'CONNOR SARGENT • DAN ROSS • JAMES McKIMMEY

24 ISSUES FOR ONLY $8

For a Two Year Subscription To

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

WE TAKE CONSIDERABLE pride in the variety and range of *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine's* contents. Our aim has been to bring you, every month, the work of both outstandingly gifted, nationally famous writers, and truly brilliant newcomers. And, of course, there's always a brand new and especially written Mike Shayne story in every issue. So, subscribe NOW. The subscription price is $6.00 per year for 12 issues—$12.00 for two years for 24 issues. But—by filling in the conveniently placed coupon below you will receive a two year subscription—24 issues—for only $8.00; a saving of $4.00. Add $1.00 for foreign postage.

WE DECIDED ON this unusual bargain subscription offer because so many readers keep telling us it's difficult to locate their favorite magazine on the present over-crowded newsstands. Subscribe immediately—and you won't have to go searching for Mike Shayne. He'll come to you 24 consecutive months with a new complete, dramatically suspenseful adventure.

REMEMBER: More than 35,000,000 copies of the amazing redhead's paperback books have been sold to date. And the Mike Shayne stories you read in our magazine appear there first, and in many instances are never reprinted in paperbacks or in any other form. You *may* miss some of Mike's most interesting capers altogether if you don't read *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine.*

SUBSCRIBE NOW . . . RE-SUBSCRIBE NOW . . . for the biggest bargain of your crime-reading life. Two years—24 issues—yours for only $8.00. Remit additional dollar ($1.00) for Canada, Mexico, Pan American countries and all foreign countries.

RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC.
160 West 46th Street, New York, New York. 10036

Kindly enter my subscription to **MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE** for two years (24 issues) @ $8.00. Add $1.00 for foreign postage.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY, STATE, ZIP NO. .....

Please print NOV. 187

MIKE SHAYNE
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER, 1965 Vol. 17, No. 6

LONG COMPLETE NOVELET

The Case of the GORGEOUS GAMS

by JOHN D. MacDONALD

It was a big story, but the murder victim seemed at first to be just another of the city's unfortunates. So the dynamite blast and the headlines were delayed.

. . . . . 2 to 34

NEW MIKE SHAYNE ADVENTURE

THE UNNECESSARY MURDER
BRETT HALLIDAY 96

THREE EXCITING NOVELETS

PREMONITION OF EVIL
JAMES O'CONNOR SARGENT 44

INNOCENT BYSTANDER
LARRY MADDOCK and CORRIE HOWARD .. 65

KITCHEN KILL
JONATHAN CRAIG 112

LEO MARGULIES
Publisher

CYLVIA KLEINMAN
Editorial Director

H. N. ALDEN
Associate Editor

NEW SHORT STORIES

COUNTERPOINT
GINA DESSART 35

A DECENT LIE
JAMES McKIMMEY 85

THE HORSES OF TANG
DAN ROSS 130

LET THE CREDIT GO
JAMES HOLDING 135

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, VOL. 17, No. 6. November, 1965. Published monthly by RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC. 160 W. 46th St., N. Y., N. Y. 10036. Subscriptions, 12 issues $6.00; 24 issues $12.00; single copies 50¢. Second-class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional mailing offices Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious © 1965, by RENOWN PUBLICATION, INC. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster—return 3579 to 160 W. 46th St., New York, New York. 10036.

The slain girl had been just one of the city's unfortunates . . . in the eyes of the police. So the dynamite blast was delayed.

The Case of the GORGEOUS GAMS

A POWERFUL CRIME NOVELET

by JOHN D. MacDONALD

ANDY BANDA shuffled along Bay Street at two in the morning. He was like an old freighter heading for home port, the pools of light under the street lamps serving as channel markers. He was just as much of an old hulk, flesh sagging on the heavy bones, his clothes like a poorly packed rag-bag. He smelled of dead wet leaves and freshly turned soil. The street was empty.

He felt good. A little high from the beer he had wheedled, his pockets full of pretzels from Jimmy's Place. Song running through his head. Glow worm, that was it. Glow little glow worm. *Tum tum-tum tum tum,* shuffle, shuffle.

He passed the alley mouth next to Gulick's Grocery and walked on for four slow steps. The *tum tum* died in his throat. He stood still. He looked up the street and down the street. Emptiness. Silence. He went slowly back and peered intently into the narrow alley.

His gaze traveled over trash cans, cartons, garbage. And a pair of legs, a woman's legs, protruding from black shadow into the faint

© 1951, by Popular Publications, Inc.

diagonal of light from the nearest street standard.

"Lord a mercy!" Andy said. The old nursery rhyme went through his head. *One shoe off and one shoe on, higgledy piggledy, my son John.*

One red shoe on. Not really a shoe. A sole with red straps and a red thong tied around the slim ankle.

He turned and leaned against the corner of Gulick's, elaborately casual. He took a pretzel out of his pocket and popped it into his mouth. He was disturbed enough to bite where there weren't any teeth. The sharp crust of the pretzel bit into the soft gum. He felt wetness on his brow. It wasn't warm enough to sweat, even with the three ragged sweaters and the safety-pinned coat.

"Tum tumtum tum tum, glimmer, glisten," he said, deep in his throat.

Emptiness, silence. A distant diesel yawp. Cat song in a distant alley. Andy Banda scuttled back into the shadows of the alley beyond the reach of the diagonal of light. Something stirred in the garbage and then scuttled away, leaving his heart high in his throat, choking his breathing.

He moved over nearer and his shoe thumped a trash can. He leaned over it and looked down to where her head was angled against the brick wall. Her face appeared slowly as his eyes got used to the light. A pale oval. No sound from her. The third pocket produced a kitchen match. He listened. No footsteps coming.

He scratched it on the bricks and held it low, near her face. One look was enough. He dropped the match into the wall of darkness. "Lord a mercy," he whispered.

The red-headed one from the big house down at the corner of Hayson and Bay. What was her name? Maggie? Margie? No—Migs! That was it. Migs with half her forehead all crimson crusty and dished in like a busted pot. She had been a pretty good figure of a woman. The high-off-the-ground kind. Leggy. Sassy as well, with that rough tough tongue of hers.

Suddenly Andy realized that he was standing by a very dead body. If his feet had obeyed him at that moment he would have run. He couldn't remember the last time he had run. But his feet wouldn't work and his heart came up and throbbed in his throat.

Slowly the wave of fear went away. He remembered something. Migs in a bar. Not Jimmy's Place. Migs, and that locket. Opening it up to show the guy she was with. "See?" she said. "My mad money."

He braced one hand against the wall and reached down into the darkness. His finger-tips touched the oily coldness of her lips and he yanked them back, shivering all over. He corrected his aim and

reached again, fingering the cold smooth throat. His clumsy fingers found the gold chain, looped under it. He pulled. The chain was strong. Her head came off the paving stone.

He grunted and yanked harder. The chain broke. Her head dropped back with a *thunk*. Andy swallowed hard. He straightened up and shoved the chain and locket into his pocket. He stiffened as he heard heels coming, striking firmly but in irregular rhythm on the sidewalk. He moved back into the deep shadows. A figure lurched by the alley mouth and the heel taps receded.

Andy sidled out of the alley, moving his head jerkily as he stared up and down the street. He shuffled down the sidewalk. '*Tum tumtum tum tum,* locket, pocket.'

SHERIDAN STREET sloped toward the water, down to the oily slop-slip-slop of river water against the encrusted piers. The barge was half aground. Rats squeaked and chittered as Andy climbed up on the crate and pulled himself onto the deck. He went into the cabin. Aboard he called himself Captain Andy. His bunk, his lantern, his one-burner kerosene stove.

He lit the lantern and took it into the corner and waited. The river mumbled in its sleep. Refinery stink drifted on the night wind. He couldn't get the locket open. When he held it at arm's length he could see the crack where it opened. It was the shape of a heart. On the back it was engraved. Flowery. Margaret from somebody. Steve, maybe. Or Stan.

He tried with a knife blade, his tongue sticking out of the corner of his mouth, breathing hard. Then he was angry. He held it against the floor and reversed the heavy knife and hit the edge of it. The third blow snapped it open. The bill was folded small. Andy took it out and unfolded it. One hundred bucks.

There was a picture in the locket too. He looked at it. A chubby two-year-old with a pout on its face.

He lifted the glass and blew out the lantern. He had the money in one hand, the locket in the other. He went out on deck and walked forward to the part of the barge which was over the water. He threw the locket parts out so hard that he nearly fell in. He went back and sat on the bed and started to worry. He wished it had been ten dollars. What do you do with a hundred-dollar bill?

Night on Bay Street—night sliding inevitably toward morning. Night in the alley. Tiny scufflings amid the garbage. Cat song. A little after three, a child started screaming up out of sleep. Lights went on over the fish market. The child stopped. The lights went out.

Dew touched the body. A meager city dew. It lay where it had fallen when the blow had made a

thick damp sound in the night. The dead woman's shoulders were a tight fit between the trash can and the brick wall.

At four o'clock Car 80 cruised down Bay. Kendall and Sharron riding the streets on the twelve-to-eight. Kendall and Sharron hating each other. Too long a time in the same car. A professional marriage that had graduated from bickering to a grim silence. Mitch Kendall, Toby Sharron. Broad-faced, heavy-shouldered men riding in grimness and silence through the night streets.

They went by the alley. The legs were there. From the cruiser they were rolls of brown paper, or boards dimly seen. Not legs. Not long slim legs that had danced, that had played hopscotch on the city streets, that had been cold in the winter and warm in the summer and alive for twenty-five years. Now no chance for the blue bulge of vein, the gradual thickening of ankles, the wattled sag. Slim dead legs that could have been almost anything because they were with the jumbled trash.

The two policeman rode by in the hate that was a sickness in them.

A little after five the city turned from blackness to a drifting grey. The mists came up the slope from the river. Andy Banda muttered in his sleep and a rat paused alert for danger. The city was grey and the building lifted stone shoulders into the greyness.

John French walked up Bay, doughnuts wadded heavily and greasily in his middle, the aftertaste of coffee bitter in his mouth, his thin shoulders hunched against the dawn chill. He knew he was going to be sick again. This might be the last time he would have to be sick. Each morning it was harder to force himself to be at Ret's Diner at six. The breakfast orders would run heavy. He'd stand hunched over the grill. Hotcakes, sausage, waffles, eggs. The smell of grease never left his hair or his clothes. In his mind a card file operated. It kept track of all the orders.

His stomach began to churn. He saw the alley ahead and, bending almost double from the fierce hot pain, he stumbled toward it. Tears

ran from his eyes. He went back into the alley and he was ill and he held himself upright with his hands and forehead against the cold bricks. After a time he took out a handkerchief and wiped the tears from his face. He walked unsteadily toward the sidewalk. He saw the legs. He looked at them dully, without comprehension. He leaned over the body and looked at the face behind the trash can.

When Kendall drove out of Hayson onto Bay he saw the scarecrow figure ahead, standing in the middle of the road, pin-wheeling its lean arms, swaying in the grey light. Mitch Kendall tramped hard on the gas. The cruiser leaped forward, then stood on its nose as he hit the brake.

The scarecrow couldn't speak. It kept pointing at the alley. The two first-class patrolmen saw the legs and ran over. They stared down. "The lanky redhead from Rosa's house," Toby Sharron said.

"Get him," Kendall said, pointing at John French walking away down the far sidewalk. Sharron ran after French. Kendall called in the report, then pulled the cruiser over to the curb by the alley mouth. Toby Sharron came back with the protesting scarecrow. There was nothing to do but wait, keep people away.

AFTERWARD, long afterward, Simon Shasta was destined to wonder what might have been the course of events if he had not had insomnia that night. He woke up at four with that sudden alertness he knew meant no more sleep that night. He had been dreaming that he was still on the paper, back before he'd held down the city editor's desk. Sobbing Simon, the emotional legman.

But that was when he had lived in a small room. Now he was in a bachelor apartment that had been, for a short time, not a bachelor apartment at all. Now he did a feature now and then to keep his hand in, but most of the time it was article stuff for the big magazines. Get Simon Shasta. He'll put some heart in the copy.

He sat on the edge of the bed and rubbed his grainy eyes and then got up and turned on the lights. He showered and shaved and dressed, knowing that he had to get out of the place, had to walk off some of his restlessness. He was a tall slat-thin man with big knuckles, sloping powerful shoulders and the face of a weary eagle. Martha's trip to Reno had taken the edge off him, he knew. The restlessness was with him more often. Life had lost a lot of its point but that did not diminish the intensity of his restlessness.

He put on a light topcoat, jammed the crumpled brown felt hat on his head, and lit his first cigarette of the day as he went slowly down in the self-service elevator.

He walked with long slow stride

down by the park and across through the shopping section, past the display windows of the big department stores. Down beyond the City Hall he saw Police Headquarters and remembering when he had covered the police beat on the night trick, he walked over and climbed the steps to the big door. The offices opened off the corridor. He walked down the corridor, his steps resounding hollowly. The desk sergeant was young, and a stranger.

"Something I can do for you?" he asked.

"Just going back to the press room. Who's on?"

"Kayhill."

Simon walked back and pushed the door open. Kayhill looked up and grinned. "Hi, Sim. Taking a look at the common people?"

Shasta nodded at the man from Identification, and then at one of the lockup boys from the basement. "Couldn't sleep," he said. "Deal me in?"

"After this hand. Pitch. Two bits."

They were playing on a cleared flat-top desk. Shasta hung his coat and hat on the rack and shoved a desk chair over. The papers covered the night trick on a cooperative basis.

"Quiet tonight," Shasta said as the man from Identification dealt.

"A few drunks, a bad smash out on the Cape Valley Road. But nothing now for two hours."

And so Simon Shasta had taken high and low, had missed the jack, and was about to take game when, at 5:35 the call came in. Communications tipped the press room and Shasta went down and rode over in Kayhill's car. They were the first to arrive. Another cruiser had been routed over to help Kendall and Sharron. The lab people came ten minutes later and the dead wagon came ten minutes after that.

They waited around and at 6:15 Lieutenant Ritchie Folz, a crisp little man with a pencil-thin mustache, came and took a look and told them to take the body away. With pictures taken, and with the cause of death pretty obvious, the coroner's man could perform his function just as well in the morgue after a hearty breakfast.

After they slid the basket in and drove away, Lieutenant Folz turned his attentions to the weapon. It was a brick with one corner chipped off, old cement still clinging to it. The lab men reported that the surface was too rough to take a fingerprint.

John French told his story to Folz—what there was of it—and then trotted down the street in a shambling way when Folz dismissed him.

At last Folz noticed Shasta. "Look what's here! Hunting for your lost youth, Sim?"

Shasta smiled without warmth. "Maybe I'm doing an article on

the efficient functioning of our force. Who'll be the precinct man on this, Ritchie?"

"Sergeant Feller, probably. Coffee?"

Shasta glanced at Rudy Kayhill. Kayhill said, "I've got some phoning to do."

Shasta got into the department sedan beside Ritchie Folz. Folz drove back to headquarters, and parked in the reserved space. The city was coming alive, working up to the final crash and blare of traffic that would reach a peak at ten of nine, and die away shortly afterward.

They went across the street to the diner squeezed edgeways into a tiny lot. The diner was run by an ex-officer named Ned Sherman who had been shot off a roof back in the merry days of the gang wars.

"Take a booth," Folz said. They sat opposite each other. Folz cupped his face in his hands for a moment, then ran his fingers back through the crisp black hair over his ears, straightened his shoulders, looked immediately freshened, alert.

Folz said, "I read that long one you did. Not the magazine version. Went out and bought a book. Want to autograph it"

"How do you spell your last name?" Shasta asked.

"Are you just miserable by nature, or is it an ulcer, Sim?"

"Maybe little dead girls make me sick."

"Oh, that? You don't want to talk about that, do you?"

Sim Shasta frowned. He knuckled his chin. "I don't know. There's something there. There's—"

"There's a tramp bashed in an alley, Sim. Maybe she said no to the wrong guy. Or maybe she said yes to the wrong guy. Who cares? Now we make with the legs. I detail a bunch of the boys to cover the joints tonight. We'll find out who she was with, or who was scrapping with her. Up and down Bay Street. Trudge, trudge. So don't go all philosophical about it, Sim."

"When you're dead. Ritchie, you're dead a very long time."

"And when you laugh, laugh like hell. I, too, read Hemingway. But you can't find anything in the death on one Margaret Morris, woman of uncertain virtue, to write about."

"Suppose I want to do a little personal research on it?" Shasta asked.

Folz made a negligent wave of the hand. "Go ahead. Just stay out of my hair."

It angered Shasta a little. He said softly, "Of course, part of the full story would have to include you, Ritchie, and how you came to be a cop—and how an utterly compassionless guy like you can be an effective cop, but never a great cop."

Folz smiled. "There you go again. I've heard that line before.

To be good I'm supposed to bleed for all those people. I'm supposed to bend over the poor dead body of the redhead with my salty tears falling on her upturned face."

Shasta shook his head slowly. "No. Not that, Ritchie. But somewhere inside, you should feel a tremendous sense of anger and urgency. Anybody who kills one person kills a little bit of all of us. It should be personal with you."

"Sorry, Sim. It isn't. It's impersonal. Somebody bashes a tramp, as I said before. Now the majesty of the law will bash him. I'm just a little old oily cog."

Shasta ordered bacon and eggs with his coffee. Sherman stumped over on his two artificial legs and sat with them, listened without much interest to Folz's verbal shorthand on the murder of one Margaret Morris.

As they talked together, Sim Shasta was lost in his own thoughts. The murder would be in the papers. But it would be the murder of 'one of those women.' Morals were black and white. Never grey. Yet Martha, in her own silken way, had been just as much a tramp as the girl in the alley. She merely had the game and not the name. If Martha were the one found dead, Shasta wondered how he would react. Anger? Not exactly. Just a sadness, a sense of something wasted and lost. Plus hate for whomever had done it.

It was an old and familiar feeling. When he had worked on the paper he had been constantly in a state of emotional exhaustion. He had identified himself too closely with the little people who made the violent news. Never could he hold himself aloof and apart.

Now he felt, with apprehension, that he was going to be dragged into this shoddy little murder. Yet he could not be entirely unhappy about it. In an odd way it meant coming back to life again, feeling deeply about something once again after far too many months of grey insulation from life. There was a new quickness of spirit in him, a tickling down the length of his spine.

THE HOUSE THAT Rosa Ritt ran on the corner of Bay and Hayson had once been a grotesque and splendid home, with greystone towers, slate-shingled steeples, land around it. But the streets had taken the land in front, and the other buildings had nuzzled their way up to it.

It was ten minutes before anyone answered Simon Shasta's thumb on the bell. A small, round, plump, black-haired woman with cheeks like polished apples pulled the door open. She looked angry.

"What do you want?" She demanded "Come back other time, eh?"

"I want to talk about Migs," Shasta said.

Wariness replaced anger. "Po-

lice, they been here. Who are you?"

"Newspaper."

"Nothing to do with newspaper, mister. Not for Rosa. Never."

"I want to talk to you, Rosa. If you say no, I'll have some bad things written in the paper. It will make this place so hot your protection money won't buy anything. They'll throw you to the judge, you and all your happy little tribe. Is that quite clear?"

"Come in," she said sullenly, stepping back from the door.

The small parlor off the high-ceilinged hall was filled with overstuffed furniture. In addition, glaringly out of place, there was a massive unlighted juke box in rainbow colors, a small bar of chipped black plastic and dingy chrome.

Rosa sat on a big chair. She was so short her feet didn't touch the floor. The chair dwarfed her.

"I told the police she had no special boy friends," the small woman said.

"Tell me about her, Rosa. What kind of a girl was she?"

"All the time with her it's trouble. Trouble, trouble. Getting mad. Busting things. Bottles, glasses, windows. Not drinking too much. Just crazy mad. Another thing—I wanted her stay here. No. She goes up and down the street to bars when I need her here. Bad thing to do."

"Then why didn't you get rid of her. That's easy enough."

Rosa shrugged. "She was a popular girl here."

"Where did she come from?"

"She never said. One thing—she was plenty educated, using big words all the time."

"Did she act any different lately?"

Rosa pursed her lips. "No trouble lately. She was quiet—like thinking hard. Why all the questions? She was nothing much. You know that! These girls are nothing much for newspapers. Who reads about 'em?"

"Rosa, is there any chance that Migs could have been blackmailing anybody? I mean somebody who didn't want it known they had come here."

Rosa smiled smugly. "No chance. The girls know better. They try that, then they go swimming in the river."

A girl appeared in the doorway. She wore a neat dark suit, carried

a coat over her arm. She set a small suitcase down on the floor. Her face was beautiful, but in a stereotyped way. Broad, low forehead, uptilted nose, soft, vulnerable mouth, wide blue eyes fine-spun blonde hair. It was her eyes, Shasta decided. Something in them made him think of a scream echoing down long stone corridors.

In a harsh brass voice she said, "I gotta leave now if I'm going to make that bus, Rosa." She gave Shasta a flat, incurious glance.

"Back Monday, Jackie?" Rosa asked.

"Yeah. Back Monday." The girl picked up the suitcase again, and left.

Rosa said, "She was a good friend of Migs'. She feels bad, I think. Jackie goes home about once a month." Rosa snickered. "Family thinks she is a model. But that doesn't make her any different from—" She shrugged.

Shasta left as soon as he could. Out in the cool ten o'clock sunshine he felt better. The bus terminal was four blocks up Bay away from the river, one block over on Central. He covered the five blocks in long strides. Jackie sat in the small waiting room reading a magazine. There was an empty space beside her on the bench. Shasta went over and sat down. She glanced at him sharply, and he saw recognition come into her eyes, along with a trace of something else.

"School's out, Junior," she said. "Go run up a rope."

"I want to talk about Migs."

The blue eyes lost all expression. "Cop?"

"No. Just interested."

She turned back to her magazine. "Goodbye now," she said.

"You don't want to talk about her?"

"You must be intelligent!"

"Okay, Jackie. It won't be much of a trick to find out where you go when you go home. You've bought your ticket. And I can find you and drop some hints around your home town about your modeling career."

The magazine slipped. She caught it before it dropped. Her eyes blazed. In a husky whisper she called him every name in the book. Shasta sat solemnly and took it. When she was out of breath he said, "You made me do it that way, Jackie. You're supposed to be a friend of hers. Wouldn't it be nice to find out who killed her? Wouldn't it be nice if you were willing to help find out?"

Tears gathered on her lower lids. She blinked them away. "Oh, nice. A big fat dream. Why don't you leave me alone, mister? Nobody will find out who killed her. I got a hunch the cops won't try very hard."

"Because of what she was?" He said brutally.

"You play dirty pool. Partly because of that. Partly because of other things."

"What other things."

"I want to keep on living too, mister. But don't ask me why."

"I think you'll tell me everything you know, Jackie."

The metallic voice of the ticket agent announced a bus ready to leave. She stood up. "Look, I got to go now."

"Where are you going, Jackie?"

She sighed resignedly. "Huntsville. Thirty-five miles down the river."

"I'll drive you down."

"No, look. I want to take the bus. Please let take the bus."

"Go ahead. I'll be in Huntsville when you get off the bus."

"What's your angle, mister? Tell me that."

He picked up her small suitcase. "We can get a cab right in front."

She followed him meekly. On the way to his apartment house she sat huddled in the far corner, smoking a cigarette, her face weary and expressionless.

He backed his car out, and then, with her sitting silently beside him, he fought the lights and the traffic until the turn onto River Boulevard. He held the speed at a leisurely forty-five and relaxed. "Now you can talk, Jackie."

"You're not going to get much out of this. don't know much, I've been thinking. I guess there's no harm in talking to you. I guess sometimes you have to trust certain parties. But I've seen you some place."

"My name is Simon Shasta, Jackie."

"That doesn't ring any bells, Mr. Shasta. I'm Myra Jackson."

"I used to be a newspaperman. Now I write books and articles."

"I suppose this is for a book," she said, with a sneer in her voice. "Or maybe for laughs."

The shoulder was wide. He pulled off and stopped the car. He turned and took both her hands in his. She looked wary, startled. "Look, Jackie. Just for me, take that chip off your shoulder. Maybe you feel bad. Maybe you feel dirty. You're in a bad and a sordid business, but I'm not feeling holier-than-thou. You are a person and Migs was a person, and she had her skull smashed in an alley. Migs was your friend, and I want you to accept me as your friend. I think I am."

She wrenched her hands away convulsively. She sat huddled and weeping. He gave her his handkerchief. The storm did not take long, but it left her wan, her face puffy.

"You know how people talk," she said in a faraway voice. "Migs and me. We talked a lot. Dreams, maybe. Things we'd do. Mistakes we'd made. She was one sweet gal. We both got into the racket in usual ways. She made a mistake on a guy. Me, I just got broke and hungry and had too much pride to go home like I should have, like I would do if I had it to do over.

"Funny thing, you always think

you're going to save money and get out of it. But you get feeling blue. You got a couple hundred bucks and you blow it on clothes, because you want to look expensive outside to make up for how you feel inside. But you aren't fooling anybody, ever. Maybe Migs had more guts than the rest of us. We used to dream that the two of us, we'd get hold of some dough. We'd go west in a big convertible. As if a thousand miles was going to make ladies of us, I guess.

"Three days ago she told me we were going to do it. he said she had it all planned. She said she was getting her hands on some real money. I asked her how much and she said maybe around fifty thousand. I told her she was nuts. She laughed and said I'd see if she was. She said we were going to have to run like hell for a while, and stay out of sight. She asked me if I was scared and I said I wasn't. We shook hands on it, like a couple of boy scouts.

"Well, you know the rest of it. I guess she tried to get the fifty thousand off the wrong joker. At least it must have been a good try."

"Blackmail?" Shasta asked.

"I've been wondering about that, Mr. Shasta. I don't see who would have that kind of dough. But she did one hell of a funny thing. I walked in on her while she was doing it, and it scared her for a minute. She had one of those heavy brown paper envelopes like bank statements come in. She had scissors and she was cutting up newspaper to fit the envelope. She wouldn't tell me what it was all about."

That sounds as though she were going to make some kind of a substitution, Jackie. Take one envelope full of money and put the other in its place."

"But who carries that kind of dough around?"

"It would be nice to find out. We can go this far. She either tried to make the substitution, or made it. She got killed either for trying, or in order to get the money back. There was no purse with the body."

"There should have been a big white shoulder bag."

He let Jackie off in the shade of the big elms of the Huntsville central square. He sat and watched her walk with neat short steps along the gravel path. Once she turned and glanced back. She did not wave.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING Ritchie Folz was standing just outside his office, his grey felt hat looking brand new, his mustache freshly clipped and trimmed. He glanced at Shasta, handed the letter he had been reading to a waiting clerk and said, "Okay, make a final draft."

"On your way out or in, Ritchie?" Shasta asked.

"My time is your time. Come in and sit and tell me I'm an average-type cop."

"You're too sensitive." Shasta

said. He followed Ritchie Folz into the neat office. Framed on the wall were Ritchie's degree from Northwestern, his reserve commission and a signed photo of J. Edgar Hoover. The desk top was so neat as to be almost painful. One pen stand, one silver-framed picture of Folz's dark-haired wife and their two young children, one inter-office communication box.

Shasta sat down and held one foot on his knee, tapped a cigarette against the side of the box. "Get anything last night, Ritchie?"

"What should I have gotten?"

"The redhead. The Morris girl," Shasta said with irritation.

"Oh, her! I guess not. They would have told me if they uncovered anything."

"Who are you kidding, Ritchie?"

Folz gave him a bland look. "Not you, certainly. Not a man of your intellect."

Shasta leaned forward and put his fingertips on the edge of the desk. "I was on Bay Street last night, Ritchie. I covered a lot of ground. They're scared down there. Not the way they should be scared if one of the girls gets it in

an alley, but a hell of a lot more scared than that. And a lot of checking you did. One tired old second-grade shuffling from joint to joint and asking dull questions. Don't make me laugh, Ritchie."

There was a white pinched look around Folz's nostrils. He got up so suddenly that the desk chair rolled back a full yard. He went to the window that looked out to where the river was a ribbon of smeared mercury in the slow morning rain. He stood with his back to Shasta.

"Stay out of it," he said in a strained voice. "Just stay out of it."

"Are you warning me, Ritchie?" Shasta asked.

Ritchie Folz sat down quietly and walked the chair back up to the kneehole of the desk. He looked down at his knuckles, his voice flat. "Remember what I said about just being a cog? I haven't changed."

"So somebody told you to lay off," Shasta said in a voice ripe with contempt.

Ritchie Folz laughed harshly. "Stay out of the movies, Sim. You sound like a cub reporter. It doesn't go that way. You just ask for the assignment of men. It turns out they're all busy. Important stuff. You keep asking. No dice. Sooner or later you catch on."

"Was there anything to keep you from doing a little gumshoeing in person, or is that beneath you?"

"I can make you a list. Nine thousand mortgage on the house. Seven hundred I owe on the car. Want to know what my insurance program costs?"

"Keep on playing ball, Ritchie, and maybe you can stand in line with your hand out just like some others I could name."

Folz came around the desk fast, his face white. He grabbed the front of Shasta's tweed suit, bunching it in his hand, the other fist clenched. Shasta stared calmly up at him, half smiling. Folz sighed and let go. He went back to the window.

"How big is it?" Shasta asked gently.

"I don't know. I don't know anything about it, Sim. I don't want to know. Forgive me, but I don't want to know."

"Then tell me somebody who can tell me. That won't cost you anything."

"Go write a book on something. Civil War monuments.

Shasta went to the door. He pulled it open and said, "See you around, Ritchie." There was no answer. He shrugged and pulled the door shut after him, quietly, as though leaving a room of the dead.

In Mid-Afternoon Shasta sat in the dusty barroom of Jimmy's Place on Bay Street. Once upon a time there had been a half-hearted attempt made to give it a Gay Nineties atmosphere. All that remained of the attempt were imitation gas lamps on the walls, and a fleshly recumbent nude over the

bar. The bartender was remote, unfriendly, unwilling to admit that the redhead had ever come in the place. Trade was slack on Friday afternoon. A massive old man with a pouchy mouth, a livid birthmark over one eye, sat at the end of the bar, humming and muttering to himself.

Shasta studied him. Definitely a neighborhood character. Possibly he saw more than the others knew. Shasta put a bill on the bar. "Give the old guy a drink," he said.

The old man's head swiveled around with surprising quickness, a pleased smile spreading his lips away from the blackened stubs of teeth.

"That's Andy Banda," the bartender said with disgust. "If you want him in your hair it ain't none of my business. What'll it be, Andy?"

"Mmm. A rye?" Andy said dubiously, hopefully.

"Make it bonded." Shasta said.

The bartender shrugged and reached for a bottle. Andy's tongue flicked along his lower lip.

"Thank you sir," Andy said.

Shasta moved down close to him. "Don't mention it. You live around here?"

To his surprise a look of naked shocked fear came over the old man's face. "Yeah, I live around here. Why?"

"Just making conversation. I do newspaper work."

"By God! You know, I used to set type. Pretty damn fancy with a stick I was, back in those days. Then the damn linotype—"

"Where did you work?"

"Hartford Courant, by God. Oldest paper in the country. Then the linotype—"

The bartender put a shot glass and a glass of water in front of Andy. He downed the liquor with a practiced flip of a wrist, shuddered a bit, and reached for the water. "All this beer," he said huskily, "a man forgets how good liquor tastes."

"Have another?" Sim asked.

"Boy, you're the salt of the earth. Don't mind if I do."

The bartender gave Shasta another look of intense disgust. "It's your money, I suppose."

After the fourth shot, Shasta tried to swing the conversation around to the dead redhead. The old man seemed to know her and know all about it, but he showed a stubborn unwillingness to discuss the slaying. He kept trying to swing the conversation back to typesetting in the old days. The early evening crowd began to come in.

As the bartender grew more busy, Shasta had a chance to press harder with the questions. "I guess she worked for Rosa?"

Andy giggled. "Rosa's sore as a boil. On account of the way some fellows come in and tore the place up."

"She call the cops?"

"You don't call the police, boy,

when those kind of guys tear you up."

"I wonder why they did that?" Shasta said, trying to keep his tone casual.

"Looking for something, I'd say," Andy muttered.

"Like what?"

"Nobody knows. Everybody's got a lot of guesses. Tore hell out of the room Migs used to have."

Simon Shasta's mind was racing. Things were fitting together. It meant that in all probability the redhead had made the substitution and gotten away with it, and that killing her hadn't resulted in recovery of the money.

The bar stools were filled and people were standing behind the seated customers, reaching around them for drinks. The lights had come one. The juke had started. Women were laughing with the high pitch of early evening, of Friday night.

Shasta said, "You didn't happen to see her the night before last, did you Andy?"

Andy shook his head. No. Not me. Hell, no!"

Shasta felt the excitement in his throat. The old man had protested too much. Much to much. "Come on now, Pop," he said. "I've been buying you drinks, haven't I?"

"Doesn't matter, boy. Anybody says I saw her is a damn liar." The old man had raised his voice.

The bartender came over, put his hands flat of the bar and looked at Andy. "Go home! You're making too much noise. You talk to much."

"You won't be throwing me out," Andy yelled. "And you'd better not try it."

"Come on, Andy," Shasta said. "We'll find another spot."

"I like it here and here I'm a-stayin'!" Andy yelled. His face was purpling. He looked around at the customers who were grinning at him. "This here's a public place and you gotta serve people with money."

"When did you ever have a dime?" the bartender sneered.

Andy reached inside his sweaters and dug around, his tongue sticking out of the corner of his mouth. He brought his hand out clutching a small greasy snaptop change purse. He clicked it open, took out a folded bill and slapped it triumphantly on the bar. The upturned corner showed the symbol "100."

Shasta felt the sudden tension in Jimmy's Place. It was a strange reaction. The juke ended a number. There was a complete and utter silence. The bartender's eyelids slid down, half covering his eyes. The customers instinctively drifted away from the two of them.

Andy's small eyes began to dart from side to side. He turned pale. He snatched up the bill and in trying to put it back in the purse, he dropped it. He slid off the stool and fumbled for it under the brass bar

rail. The purse clicked and he stood up.

A lean man with a fancy shirt and small bright eyes stood down the bar. He emptied his glass and set it on the bar with a sharp click. He wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. "Well, well, well," he said softly. His eyes looked amused, triumphant.

Andy Banda stood there, his lips moving, making no sound. He hunched his big shoulders and plunged through the crowd toward the door. Shasta left his change on the bar and followed Andy. He caught up with him fifty feet down the street.

"Leave me be," Andy said. His tone was sober, frightened.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Your fault, boy. Givin' me liquor. Leave me be."

"Where did you get the hundred-dollar bill?"

Andy stopped and backed against a wall. He looked like a cornered animal. "Just leave me be. That's all."

Suddenly the old man moaned. Shasta turned. A car cruised slowly down the street. One man stepped out while it was moving, taking two running steps up onto the curb to catch his balance. He stood still, his hands cupped around a match as he lit a cigarette. The flame glow touched blunt features. He waved the match out.

The car stopped beyond Shasta and Banda. Two other men got out. The three of them converged slowly on Shasta and the old man. Shasta looked up and down the street. The sidewalks of Bay Street were oddly empty for this time of evening. The damp street had an oily glitter under the street lights.

"Get in the car, Andy," a thick-bodied man said.

Andy stood like an old bull in the ring, tired after too many charges at the illusive cape, his head lowered. He made a small sound in his throat.

"What do you want with him?" Shasta demanded.

With a contemptuous casualness the nearest man, the thick-bodied one, slammed his hand at the pit of Shasta's stomach. Simon instinctively brought his arm in and

took the blow on his elbow. It numbed his arm from wrist to shoulder.

Shasta chopped at the man's face with all his strength, hitting downward against the shelf of the jaw, driving the man's mouth open, forcing him down to his knees. The man who had just gotten out of the car had slipped behind Shasta. He pinned his arms. The man on his knees grunted and stood up. He kicked hard. Shasta turned to take it on his hip, but not quickly enough.

A wave of grey agony almost doubled him up. He knew from the tearing feeling in his throat that he screamed. He was only half conscious of being released, of slipping to the sidewalk. He lay on his side, his knees drawn up, his face and body covered with cold oily sweat. He heard a car door slam shut. With an enormous effort he rolled up onto his knees, his face against the sidewalk. He got his hands against the damp stone and pushed.

The weight of his body felt enormous. The car was gone. He got to his feet and leaned against the wall, doubled over. Inch by slow inch he forced himself erect, rivulets of sweat running down his face and throat, panting through his open mouth. With his back against the wall, his legs braced, he stood there for long minutes, his eyes shut. The taxi stand was an impossible distance away. He walked toward it, bracing one hand against the wall, shuffling his feet.

AFTER HE LEFT the doctor's office, Shasta phoned Ritchie Folz from a cigar store on the corner. He got him at his home.

"This is Shasta, Ritchie."

"Yes?" The voice was cool, controlled.

"I was being a busybody, Ritchie. Mr. Nose. Now it's different."

"You sound funny, Sim."

"I got dealt into the game, Ritchie. Physical violence is a very degrading thing. Did you ever think of that? You get hit or kicked and it makes you feel dirty."

"What brand are you drinking?"

"Hemlock, I think. Now look, Ritchie. I'm going to tell you this once. And then I'm going to write out what I told you and you either play my way, or I give it to Rudy Kayhill."

Folz's voice tightened. "Don't talk to me like that. You hear? Don't give me that kind of talk."

"Shut up. Maragret Morris was killed because she worked a substitution on some money. A big wad of money in a brown paper envelope. She got away with it. When Mr. X killed her, he didn't get his dough back. All Bay Street knows about it. That money is still floating around. I was in a bar. An elderly bum, Andy Banda, flashed a hundred-dollar bill.

"I think it was like flashing his own death certificate. He realized it too. He tried to run for it. Some very hard boys picked him up within five minutes. I can give you a description of the one who did the tipping off, and a description of two of the three who picked up the old party. Got your pencil handy."

There was long silence. Folz said in a husky voice, "Damn you, Shasta. I told you to stay away from it. Damn you!"

"It's like this, Ritchie. Will you or won't you?"

Another long silence. "I've got a pencil right here."

"Good boy!" Shasta gave the descriptions. Everything he could remember.

Folz said, "I suppose you know who those boys are?"

"I've got a pretty good hunch, Ritchie. Some of the young men employed in questionable capacities by one influential citizen named J. Colin Linden."

"You know, Sim, that they aren't going to kill the old citizen."

"How can you be so sure?"

"If they were, you wouldn't have gotten a look at them. And if they kill him by accident, you better go to Bermuda. You're being smart so far. Do you know what the money was?"

"The payoff for the week in that whole ward, I'd imagine. Would you know who does the collecting?"

"It has been handled in the past in that area by one Arlie Toska, a graduate of the Kansas City school of collection in the old days."

"Then wouldn't he be your man on the killing?"

"I did a lot of thinking after you left my office, Sim. A hell of a lot of thinking. I made some discreet inquiries on my own hook. Mr. Toska has apparently walked off the edge of the earth."

"Does it fit?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes. He is rumored to have a weakness for red hair and long-legged women of spirit."

"Ritchie, I'm—I'm glad you did some digging on your own. What made you think of Arlie Toska?"

"The way the street acted. You could feel it. Arlie made Bay Street his street. King of Bay Street, Sim."

"So somehow Andy got the money. Do you know Andy?"

"Not well enough to know where he lives. He won't keep the money, Sim. Go home. Go to bed, and get some rest."

"Just what the doctor told me, Ritchie. But I don't want to rest. I'm thinking of that old bum."

"Your heart is bleeding?"

"He's no good to himself or anybody else. But—you can say I'm bleeding."

"Get some rest, Sim. I'm going out. Just like a square-shouldered movie hero. I'm going out and see

what I can do before it makes like off with my head."

"It won't be that bad. Believe me, it won't be that bad."

"Bub, your crystal ball is all blurred up," Folz said. He hung up with a soft clack on the line. Sim listened to the humming of an empty wire. He hung up and walked out of the booth.

A PRETTY MAID in a dark uniform, wearing a starched white cap, ushered Simon Shasta into a small study off the main hallway of the big stone house on the Paris Valley Road. The desk was painted off-white, antiqued in amber. The walls, reflecting the light of the brass student lamp on the desk, were a silvery grey. The single picture was a Braque, joyful and airy. All the books were in their dust jackets, the two ceiling-high shelves on either side of the fireplace gay with their bright colors.

Shasta stood absently reading the book titles, hearing the distant sound of party, the metronome vibration of Cuban music.

Soon J. Colin Linden came briskly in. He was a small man in his fifties with a lean weather-reddened face, clean shaven. His grey hair was cropped close to the well-shaped skull. He wore pale slacks, a thin maroon turtle-neck sweater, a tweed jacket without lapels.

He came over, his hand outstretched, saying, "Sim! This *is* a surprise!"

Shasta didn't take the outstretched hand. Linden gave him a rueful smile. "Still trying to unhorse those windmills, eh?"

"Some day, J. Colin, I may shake your hand. When I get too old to care."

J. Colin Linden leaned trimly against the white desk, his arms crossed, his head cocked on one side. He said, "This is like old times. Back with the thorn in my side, the fly in my ointment. Why am I so honored now, Sim? I thought you had gone above and beyond the petty affairs of our fair little city."

"Tonight, Mr. Linden, one of the citizens in your chain of command kicked me with considerable gusto."

Linden frowned. "That was quite stupid. I don't care for that sort of thing, Sim. People frequently have to be kicked. Which one was it? I'll have him—disciplined!"

"It happened on Bay Street, Mr. Linden."

"Bay Street is not a good place to go after dark these days, Sim. People are quite restless down there, it seems. Girls being killed —that sort of thing."

"Very restless," Shasta agreed. "Arlie Toska making mistakes, payoffs being switched, old men being tortured. Very restless."

For long seconds J. Colin Lin-

den looked to be half asleep. He said softly, "I always respected your intelligence, Sim. Sometimes your batting average is astonishing, even in the educated-guess department."

"It's a very dirty affair, Mr. Linden."

"Sim, take a broad view for a moment. Suppose you ran a business. An employee grew careless with your funds—and lost them. The loss isn't big enough to hurt, but it sets a remarkably bad example. A little thing like that can

rock the boat. Or am I mixing too many metaphors?"

"Maybe the boat is already rocked, Mr. Linden. Maybe it's shipping water. Sometimes a smart man takes his loss and forgets it, and fires the careless one and goes on from there. Maybe this time you got too ruthless."

"Are you trying to rattle me, Sim?" Linden asked, smiling.

"Not at all. I was kicked. I'm going to kick back. At you. I came here to tell you that."

"Flinging down the gauntlet, so to speak?"

"If it makes you feel better to call it that."

"Sim, you've always had a perfectly childish attitude toward me. A city like this—someone will always have it in his pocket. I'm not particularly greedy. It might as well be me. I keep the outside talent from coming in and milking us dry. Why don't you just accept me as—well, as a reasonable example of a typically American phenomenon."

"I can't, Mr. Linden," Shasta said softly. "To me you're dirt. A dirty little man with a glib tongue and a convincing manner and something twisted and terrible in your mind. A polite hawk who has bought himself a chicken yard. You stink, Mr. Linden. It isn't a body odor because you use perfumed soap, I imagine. It's an odor of the soul."

Linden paled under his outdoor hue. His lips compressed, then turned into a thin smile. "Now it's off your chest, Sim. Come in and join the party. There's a young lady you might enjoy. A very generous young lady named Martha Shasta, your onetime wife."

"You dirty son," Shasta whispered. "You dirty, lousy—"

Linden laughed aloud with wholehearted joy. "Sim, you amuse me so!"

"Arlie Toska is going to come to trial and Arlie Toska is going to talk, Linden."

"And," said Linden, laughter bubbling around the words, "the police are going to start giv-

ing me traffic tickets any day now."

Shasta walked out and down the hall. He slammed the door behind him with all his strength. He glanced over toward the other cars as he walked to his own, and cursed himself for not recognizing Marth's little chartreuse foreign car sooner. Now Linden would go back to the party and be very clever about one Simon Shasta, the shining knight of journalism, and Martha would laugh as she had always laughed at any evidence of purpose or sincerity.

SIMON SHASTA was undressing slowly a little after midnight when the bedside phone began to buzz. He stretched across the bed, took it off the cradle, propped up on his elbows.

"Sim? God, I'm glad you're all right!"

"What's the matter, Ritchie? What's wrong?"

"That old man, Andy Banda. He is very dead, Sim. And you're the witness. The Commissioner can give orders to go easy on one killing, but not two. We found him on an old grounded barge he lived on. His feet were badly burned. His heart gave out, but that doesn't keep it from being murder. Have you got a gun?"

"And a license, Ritchie. But I don't—"

"Keep that gun where you can reach it. Don't open the apartment door to anybody. Orders are out to have your playmates picked up. Linden will be pulling all kinds of strings to spring them. He'll be afraid we'll lever them into saying who handed out the orders."

"Did they find the money, do you think?"

"I don't know. The inside of the barge was ripped to hell. Maybe, maybe not. Don't stir out of that apartment. I'll call you back when we get something new. You're the only one who can testify that your playmates took the old guy away in their car."

"Hey! Don't hang up, Ritchie! Let me think. Try this for size. The old man didn't go willingly."

After a long silence, Ritchie Folz said, "Man! Oh man! I must be having softening of the brain. That's what we need. The Federal boys have been aching for a chance to move in on the Linden setup. Kidnaping gives them the right. I'll phone their regional office right now. Linden's organization will fall apart like the Long Island Railroad."

It took Shasta a long time to find the gun. The slide was flecked with rust, but the barrel looked clean. He slid a loaded clip into the automatic, worked a round into the chamber and put the safety on. He put it under his pillow.

He lay in the dark bedroom, his long finger laced at the back of his neck, and he looked up at the ceiling where moved the thin re-

flected glow of city lights. He was sleepless and he thought of Martha, and of Migs whom he had never known, and of Jackie. Thoughts twisted through his mind and some of them were evil, as are the infrequent thoughts of all men.

But, over all, there was the thought that it is good to come alive again, to feel intensely about something—anything. It was good to fight and be hurt. Even a vain fight was better than none, but now this fight looked as though it had a small chance of success.

At a few minutes after two o'clock J. Colin Linden called. Shasta answered the phone in the middle of the first buzz.

"Sim? Sorry you left in such a huff, boy. I've worried about it."

"I bet."

"Even though we've disagreed, Sim, I've always been fond of you."

"I'm touched," Shasta said gravely.

"Seeing you, Sim, reminded me of an old ambition of mine. I've always thought that one day I would take a leisurely trip around the world. It looks as though I'll never get away. But you, Sim, have a wonderfully graphic way with words. Through you, Sim, I could take that trip by proxy. Long letters from you, about places I'll never see."

"Very interesting," Shasta said carefully.

"You can take a morning plane, Sim. I'll get the tickets, plane and ship, meet you at the airport with enough to cover you for the year. One hundred thousand dollars, and all expenses. That wouldn't be taxable, Sim."

Shasta lay back with the phone to his ear. He smiled, did not answer.

"Sim! Sim, are you there? Sim!" Then he heard Linden's harsh curse. In the background he heard a soft and familiar voice, a voice that twisted his heart, saying, "What's wrong, darling?"

Shasta gently replaced the phone on the cradle. After a few moments he dialed police headquarters.

"Lieutenant Folz? Who is calling him, sir?"

"Simon Shasta."

"Mr. Shasta, Lieutenant Folz is in Central Hospital in serious condition. He was shot while attempting to make an arrest."

"Who shot him?" Shasta asked in a voice that did not sound like his own.

"Arlie Toska, Mr. Shasta. It happened in the back room of Jimmy's Place on Bay Street. Arlie acted crazy. Arlie had already killed one man, one of his own people, and he was sitting there wounded when Lieutenant Folz came in. As Lieutenant Folz fell, Mr. Shasta, he shot Arlie twice through the face. It's a hell of a thing, isn't it?"

"You don't know just what a

hell of a thing it is," Shasta said evenly.

He hung up. The picture was a bit clearer. Arlie Toska had killed the redhead. Somebody had tipped Linden that the Federal people were coming into the case, based on the kidnapping of Andy. So now Linden was bringing all his guns to bear, trying to eliminate all the strings that fastened him to the case. He'd sent someone after Arlie, but Arlie had been quicker. He'd sent Shasta an offer, but Sim had declined. J. Colin Linden was upset, unpredictable, dangerous.

Shasta phoned the hospital. The desk said. "That patient is listed as critical. I can give you no further infor—"

It took three calls to get hold of Kayhill. Kayhill's voice was thin with excitement. "Rudy, how bad is Ritchie Folz?"

"Right bad, Sim. One in the gut and one high in the chest. Far as I know, he's still on the table. He's tough, though. I was over there talking to his cute wife. Lot of guts, that girl."

"Rudy, I've got a lot of stuff that makes me a dangerous risk to have around. I don't want it in print yet, but I want the load spread around. Linden wants me out of the picture. You clear me with your city desk. I'll give you five minutes, then phone it in to rewrite. Have them put it on a tape, if you can."

"Sure, Sim. Sure. Funny to have you back on the job."

"Funny like a crutch," Shasta said.

He hung up. As he was waiting for the minutes to pass, there was a knock at his door. He went over to the door and called through it. "Who is it?"

"Agent Ted Johnson, Mr. Shasta. Federal Bureau of Investigation."

Shasta felt a mighty weight slip from his shoulders. He shoved the automatic into his pajama pocket and unlocked the door. The voice had been reassuringly crisp and businesslike.

THEY CAME IN with a rush. Three of them. Two of them were familiar. The stocky one who had kicked him, and the one with the bright shirt from Jimmy's Place. Shasta went down hard, tasting the blood in his mouth, rolling the bit of broken tooth on his tongue. He heard cloth rip as the gun was yanked away from him. He reached out to grab the nearest pair of ankles and a heel stamped hard on his hand. They yanked him to his feet, walked him backward to a chair and thrust him down.

"Now be good," the stocky one said. There was a purplish bruise on his jaw.

"You boys must be a little worried," Shasta said. "You know the penalty for kidnapping."

"We *were* worried, friend. But not so much now," the stocky man said. "Now just please shut up."

The three of them were nervous. After a time the phone buzzed. The stocky one went in and answered it. He came back to the doorway. "Bring him in here. Pants, shoes and a topcoat will be enough. We got to move him."

Simon Shasta had never felt an anger more cold. There was fear intermingled with it, but fear that was drowned in the anger. They pulled him into the bedroom, pushed him so hard that he fell clumsily to one knee.

As he dressed, as slowly as he dared, he kept looking around for a weapon—any sort of a weapon. On the bedside table was a thick glass ashtray. He knew he could reach it, but not with the three of them watching him. There had to be some sort of a diversion. Any risk, no matter how small, was worth taking.

"You know," Shasta said, "that you boys are just as dangerous to him as I am. You take care of me, and then he has you taken care of. With the Bureau involved, he can't afford to take any risks at all."

"Shut up and snap it up," the heavy-bodied one said. His eyes were remote.

"It wasn't your fault," Shasta said. "Turn states evidence and you'll be in the clear. I've phoned the whole story to the *Record.* They took it down on tape."

"Hurry, damn you."

"All on tape. Complete descriptions of you boys."

The thin one who had been in the bar said nervously, "Maybe it's an angle we ought to figure, Al."

Al reached the thin one in two strides. He cuffed him across the mouth. "Either you do as—"

Shasta snatched up the ashtray and hurled it. It seemed to float through the air in slow motion. It turned over once and the rounded edge of it struck against the bridge of the stocky one's nose. Incredibly, the man caught it in his thick hands as it dropped. He looked down at it, as though he were a record collector reading a label on a disc.

Still holding it in his hands, he fell face down on it, a heavy shoulder striking the thin man on the thigh, driving him back. Shasta reached the third member of the party, the one who had not yet spoken. He pulled his fist back and then stood, frozen, looking down at his own gun aimed at his belly. The third man was big and rangy, but his head was oddly small, his face round and pasty.

"Easy," he whispered.

Bright Shirt was on his knees beside Al. He looked at the man with the gun. "Joey, Al's dead!"

"He's just out."

"I tell you, Joey, he's dead, No heart and no breathin'."

Shasta felt ill. He had heard

that a blow with the edge of the palm across the bridge of the nose would kill if it hit in such a way to drive small sharp bones back into the brain.

"What are we going to do?" Bright Shirt asked, his voice going thin.

"Shut up, Vinny. I'm thinking."

"Oh, great," Vinny said bitterly. "Now he's thinking."

"Why don't you two just run while you can?" Shasta said mildly. "Run like hell."

Joey sighed. "Vinny, I think we gotta sell this guy to Linden. I think Linden will want to pay for him. We can use the money for running."

Vinny turned pale. "That doesn't sound so healthy to me."

"Everything's gone to hell all of a sudden. We got to get out while we can," Joey said with great deliberation.

The phone buzzed. "Don't answer it," Joey said. He had taken charge and he seemed more sure of himself. "Let's go, gents."

The phone was still buzzing when they left, Shasta had the nightmare thought that as soon as the door closed behind them, Al would get up and answer the phone. They crowded into the small self-service elevator.

Joey said, "I got the gun right here. Linden'll pay just as much if you got a smashed knee, Shasta." Shasta glanced at his wristwatch. It was after three.

"This is kidnapping too," he said.

"You're scarin' me to death," Joey said.

They walked out onto the sidewalk. A taxi went speeding past. The street was empty. A jet made a distant roar across the top of the night.

Ten steps from the apartment building entrance the night disappeared as though it had never existed. White floodlights pinned them against the wall like insects in a display case. The voice of a metallic giant roared across the night.

"You are surrounded and covered. Put up your hands."

Shasta put his hands high, as did Vinny beside him. Joey grunted. He ran three steps, whirled, crouched and fired. An automatic weapon made an almost leisurely *cha-cha-cha-cha*. Joey lay screaming and writhing on the sidewalk, his broken legs forming crazy angles with each movement, his blood as black as India ink in the glare of the lights.

They took Shasta back upstairs. There were a number of neat, grave-eyed strangers, plus a sprinkling of local police, the ones who, like Lieutenent Folz, had been on the grease list.

The stranger in charge had silver hair and the face of a bland lion.

"My name is Thomas Gorlan, Mr. Shasta. We tracked them here

and didn't want to move in as it might endanger you. We set up the mobile equipment to take them as they came out with you. We had to take the chance that they wouldn't risk killing you in your apartment. It's not the way such things are usually done."

"Things are moving too fast for me, Mr. Gorlan," Shasta said, shaking his head.

"Thanks to Lieutenant Folz, and to you. We had a chance for a few words with the Lieutenant before he went under anesthetic."

"The one called Vinny is anxious to talk, Mr. Gorlan."

"And Joseph Ladnik should have quite a bit to say too. We'll get your formal statement later, Mr. Shasta. Give you a chance to explain the body by your bed, so to speak. Do you feel up to joining me? I'm making a call on Mr. Linden."

Shasta forgot that he was bone weary. He forgot the ache in his jaw. "Let me get the shirt and socks on," he said.

CURIOUS PEOPLE were still being herded out of the hallways of the apartment building and off the sidewalks in front as Shasta went down with Gorlan and climbed into the back of the big car. They were the second car in the convoy. The streets were too empty for there to be any need of the sirens. They went seventy miles an hour out the Paris Valley Road. The sky was turning pallid grey in the east.

A wisp of smoke was strung from the chimney of Linden's stone house. The chartreuse convertible was still parked in the drive. Simon Shasta, feeling an old and unforgotten pain, shut his teeth hard on it.

Fifteen minutes later, Gorlan and Shasta sat in the small grey-walled study. Gorlan's face was a study in professional disappointment. He said, "Of course, he'll be picked up sooner or later. The world has gotten too small to hide in these days. But his hold on this city has been broken for keeps, Mr. Shasta. I suppose that's the main thing."

"How do you suppose he was tipped off?" Shasta asked.

"A man like that has many contacts. To be poetic about it you can say that he has purchased many souls. I believe he received a call from someone in a position to know that we were trapping his people at your apartment. That, of course, was fatal. So he filled the fireplace with his records and left."

"Will you get anything out of those ashes?"

"A great deal, I think. Some of the ashes were stirred up, but he missed quite a few. A few hundred hours of the most delicate sort of work, and we'll learn a great deal about his operations. There'll be quite a few very sorry people in

the city when a Grand Jury gets its hands on our photostats of those records. We naturally turn that sort of thing over to local authorities."

Martha was brought in. She wore an oriental robe, embroidered with dozens of tiny bright dragons. Her dark hair was tousled, her cheeks flushed, her mouth angry.

She stopped when she saw Shasta. "Well, *really!*" she said. "Fancy meeting *you* here!" There was a spiteful curl to her ripened lips. "Where's Colin? Who are all these people?"

"We found her sound asleep in one of the guest rooms," a young man said.

"I judge you know her," Gorlin said to Shasta.

"She's my ex-wife, Mr. Gorlan. I'm no longer responsible for her taste."

"You're no longer responsible, period," she said.

"She regained her maiden name, Martha Dennis," Shasta said.

"Miss Dennis," Gorlan said, "your host has fled. We came to take him in custody and found he had left. I shall want a statement from you. Everything you know about him."

Shasta, standing by the fireplace, watched her. He knew her so well. He saw her even white teeth press hard against the warm underlip, and knew that Martha's brain was racing. She said, "But my goodness, why should Mr. Linden be arrested? What on earth has he done?"

Gorlan frowned. "Miss Dennis, that sounds alarmingly like an act to me."

Shasta saw her eyes fill with tears. She turned and ran into his arms. He instinctively put his arms around her, feeling her tremble. He had dreamed of holding her like this once again. He had been willing to sell his soul to have her back in his arms.

Now he held her, held her warm and trembling body, his nostrils full of the scent of her, and felt—nothing. Nothing at all. Just a remote, clinical curiosity. In his heart was a hard joy that at last he was cured.

"Tell that horrid man, Simmy," she gasped. "Tell him that I don't know what he's talking about. Oh, my darling, I've been so lonely for you, and so empty without you. I made such a dreadful mistake."

Shasta knew that he only had to back her up and she was his again.

He looked over her shoulder at Gorlan. "Miss Dennis was too ambitious to stay married to me, Mr. Gorlan. She divorced me because Linden looked like a better future."

"Simmy! What are you saying?"

"I told her in detail what sort of person Linden is. She has been an almost permanent house guest here ever since the divorce. She

knew his business and was certainly in an excellent position to know details you might find interesting."

She backed out of his slack arms and her fingers were like thin whips across his cheek. He laughed at her. Her eyes glittered, and she called him a foul name.

"Take her out and calm her down," Gorlan said to his young man.

SIMON SHASTA came slowly up out of sleep, fumbling for the phone. He picked it up. A breathless brassy voice said, "Mr. Shasta? Mr. Shasta, this is Jackie."

"Jackie. What's wrong?"

"Mr. Shasta, I've got to see you. Just as fast as you can get down here to Huntsville. Number three eighteen Cedar Street. Please hurry, Mr. Shasta."

"But look, I—"

"Please," she said, and hung up.

Shasta banged the phone back on the cradle and cursed. Only a little after ten in the morning. Just a little more than three hours sleep after coming back from Linden's house.

He cursed himself as he dressed. Be sympathetic to one of those women and they want you for a crying towel from here on in. The shower had awakened him completely. His mouth was still sore. A broken tooth needed a dentist's attention. And he had promised to be at the local FBI office at noon to make formal statements.

He took time for coffee and doughnuts, then headed south down the river through the Saturday morning sunshine.

There were a lot of cars parked around the green in Huntsville. A man directed him toward Cedar Street and he found 318 without difficulty. It was a small white bungalow, set well back from the street. There were rocking chairs on the porch. The hedge was neatly clipped.

It made him feel sad to look at the small pleasant house and think of the deadly game of deceit that Myra Jackson had to play. As he went up on the porch she opened the door.

She was as pale as death. "Come in, Mr. Shasta," she said in a low voice.

"What on the earth is the matter, Jackie?" he asked, as he went in.

"How very nice to see you, Sim!" J. Colin Linden said. He sat in a morris chair, his feet up, a gun in his hand, his eyes narrowed to steely slits.

Jackie said, "I couldn't help it, Sim. My God, I couldn't help it! My people are tied to chairs in the kitchen and he said he'd kill them if I—"

"I know you couldn't help it, Jackie. Don't worry about it."

"Now tell the nice man about

the money, dear," Linden said. "Tell him everything."

Jackie bit her lips. "I should have called you and told you. I got hungry for the money. You see, what Migs did was have another envelope all stamped. When she got the money out of Arlie Toska's coat—that's what this Mr. Linden says she did—she put it all in the bigger envelope and mailed it right there on the corner. And then Arlie caught her before she got back and hit her and killed her, but she didn't have the money any more."

"And Arlie somewhat resented being shot to death, as I ordered," Linden said evenly. "I was forced to leave my home with very little cash, Sim. It excited my thinking, and I remembered the mailbox on the corner. I should have thought of it sooner. Now I need the money. It was very pleasant to have Miss Jackson give it to me."

Linden patted his pocket. "I wondered if Migs would have mailed it to a friend. According to Rosa, over the phone, Migs had only one friend. That made it quite ridiculously simple."

"I should have called you right away," Jackie said dolefully.

"What do you want of me?" Shasta asked Linden.

"My boy, I seldom indulge myself. Generally, it's extremely bad practice. But I find that I can blame you for all of my troubles. I have no illusions about being able to talk my way out of this one. So it is going to give me a great deal of pleasure to kill you. That's why I had Miss Jackson urge you to come."

Jackie said shrilly, "But you told me you were only—"

"Hush, my dear," Linden said. "Like most of your associates, you have a remarkably unmusical voice."

"What good will it do you?" Shasta asked unsteadily. He was standing directly in front of the chair, five feet from Linden's outstretched legs. Jackie was at his right, her shoulders hunched. Her hair was tied back. She wore dungarees and a man's white shirt. She looked absurdly young, ridiculously innocent.

"Good?" Linden said. He shrugged. "Just a certain small satisfaction. I shall live longer than you do. I've never understood your motives. That trip around the world would have been pleasant."

"I wouldn't expect you to understand my motives," Shasta said.

"In traditional and thoroughly meaningless words," Linden said, raising the gun, "make your peace with your God, Mr. Shasta."

Shasta saw him through a trance, saw the brown finger slowly whitening on the trigger, saw the round eyes of the muzzle staring into his brain.

Jackie sprang soundlessly, catlike, her hooked fingers reaching

for Linden's face. The noise of the gun was not loud. No louder than if a book had been dropped flat against a hardwood floor. The momentum of her leap carried her forward onto Linden. As he struggled out from under her slackness, trying to get the gun free, Shasta moved with a speed which he would not believed possible.

As Linden's hand came out, Shasta snapped both hands down on the thin corded wrist. He thrust it out, over the arm of the chair. The gun made a second slamming sound and glass slid out of the window, shattered on the floor. For a moment there was an impasse, then Shasta overbalanced himself and fell over the arm of the chair, his hands still on the wrist.

He did not hear the bone break. He just felt the sudden lack of tension, heard Linden's thin scream. The gun dropped to the rug. Shasta snatched it up. Linden had thrust the girl aside. As he came up out of the chair Shasta swung the flat of the gun in a full arm swing, unclasping his fingers in the split second of impact.

It broke Linden's jaw and dropped him unconscious back into the chair, atop the girl. Shasta pulled him off and let him fall. He pulled Jackie tenderly out of the chair to the floor. The white shirt was growing heavy with blood. He pulled the shirttail out of the dungarees, ripped it open. The buttons flew. Just below her right breast was the dark hole from which the blood pulsed in a steady beat.

She opened her eyes vaguely. "Why did you do a thing like that?" he demanded, anger in his voice.

"People like you—Mr. Shasta —are more important than—" Her lip twisted with pain.

The village cop walked in with his .38 in his hand. "Who's shooting around here?" he demanded. "Who's shooting— Heaven to Betsy!"

SIMON SAHSTA sat with his chair pulled close to Ritchie Folz's bed. Folz looked grey, but his mustache looked as vital and vibrant as ever.

"So," said Shasta, "There should be a lot of topside vacancies the way things are breaking. A lot of people tossed out on their ear. And only guys like you back in harness to keep another Linden from taking over."

"That I can think about later. Now about this girl down the hall. I suppose you paid for a thirty-five mile ambulance ride.

"Well, after what she did for me, I couldn't—"

"Oh, sure. But don't kid me, Sim. Why the mystery? And what's this stuff about her being a model? How the hell would that Migs Morris ever get to know any—"

"Shut up, Ritchie. Damn you, I've got it fixed with Rudy Kayhill and everybody else. I've even got a pal who'll testify she worked for him as a model. Now don't spoil it all. She was one of Rosa's girls."

"Then don't be naive, Sim. She'll go back to being one of Rosa's girls. They always do."

"Not this one, Ritchie," Shasta said firmly. "Believe me, not this one."

Folz looked at him keenly. "Tell me, old pal. Tell me. Are you bleeding again?"

"A girl like that deserves a break. She only needs one to—"

"Are you bleeding, old pal?"

Shasta sighed. "A guy with no heart. That's you. No imagination."

"So I'll never make a first-rate cop, eh? Let's have that line again."

Shasta sighed. He stood up. "I take that one back."

The nurse came to the door. "You can see the other patient now, Mr. Shasta."

As Shasta went out into the hall he heard Ritchie Folz call weakly after him, "Ask the nurse to give you a bandaid, bleeder."

Simon Shasta walked down the hall behind the nurse, wondering what a good voice teacher could do about taking tones of brass out of a blonde girl's voice.

Next Issue's Complete MIKE SHAYNE Novelet

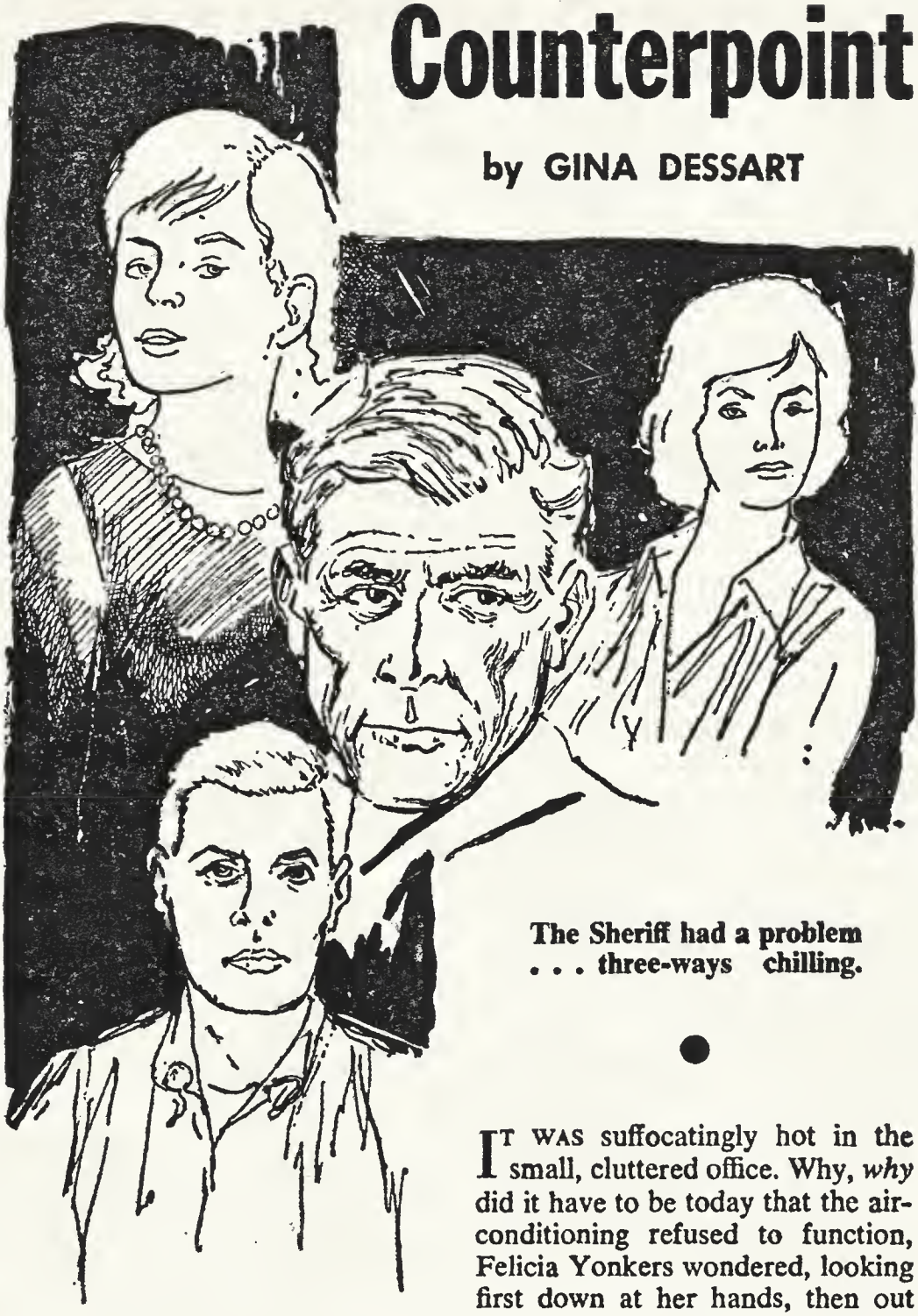
ACCENT ON MURDER

By BRETT HALLIDAY

Shayne knew that in a murder case a phone warning in advance of a client's arrival could spell out a need for haste. So he went into orbit fast.

Counterpoint

by GINA DESSART



The Sheriff had a problem . . . three-ways chilling.

●

IT WAS suffocatingly hot in the small, cluttered office. Why, *why* did it have to be today that the air-conditioning refused to function, Felicia Yonkers wondered, looking first down at her hands, then out the window at the sun-drenched

desert and mountains—looking everywhere except at the silent man behind the desk. But even without looking at him, she was piercingly aware of the sheriff of San Pedro County. He must be part Indian, she thought, with those high cheekbones and flat, unfathomable eyes. Impenetrable eyes that, nevertheless, were trying to measure her grief.

Was she, the widow, showing the proper amount of grief for the man who had died that morning? But even if she were, could the sheriff possibly understand the nature and extent of the grief she felt for Cal Yonkers?

Grief and rage, love and hate—she held such a tangled skein of emotions in her hands that she herself saw no clear line to follow. Then gradually, almost without volition in the heat-clogged room, she slipped into the past, leaving behind the impossible picture of Cal with a bullet hole in his chest—a small hole scarcely bigger than a cigarette burn in the bright pattern of his shirt.

She saw instead the tall, vibrant man she had met fifteen years ago, remembering the day, the hour. It had been less than a week after her parents had died. She was nineteen—penniless, inexperienced, and burdened with the support of a four-year-old sister—when Cal Yonkers walked into her life. Literally walked into the restaurant where she was having lunch with her kind-hearted but half-blind uncle who couldn't spare a penny of his meager pension for his orphaned nieces, and who perhaps saw immediately the solution to their dreary problem in the man approaching the table.

Certainly Uncle Will had been eager to perform the introduction: "My niece, Felicia Greenway—Mr. Yonkers." Felicia, curiously alert that day, each nerve grief-sharpened and tipped with fear, caught the scent of hope from her uncle.

Mr. Yonkers was a big man; and in her eyes terribly old. At least forty. (Forty-four, she discovered later.) A big, strong man. And she had mistaken the power of ruthlessness for the strength of self-confidence. He had self-confidence, too. There could be no doubt of that. But above all he was shrewd enough to be gentle with Pat. In the end that was why she had married him—because he was kind to her little sister.

She glanced quickly at Pat, sitting across the room beside Barry Fielding. Barry Fielding? Why had the sheriff brought in this local boss because Barry had worked for Cal, or because he'd shown an interest in Pat?

The need to answer these questions drifted away as her attention sharpened on the face of her sister. Pat was the one who was nineteen now. Pat had the innocence and the attraction she herself had pos-

sessed fifteen years ago. Innocence! Was that why Pat was wearing Levis and an oversized boy's shirt—because she found them comfortable? Or was it because Pat had learned the value of the hidden, the half-seen?

It was a disturbing thought. Felicia took a handkerchief out of the white purse on her lap, wiped away the beads of moisture that had collected at her hairline, and upper lip. Then she leaned forward and pulled the sopping material of her blouse away from her back.

And longed for her six-room apartment in San Francisco, thinking of the cool, lovely life she had made for herself and Pat after she had given up trying to live with Cal. The man who had been kind to her four-year-old sister when she had first met him became a harsh, demanding head-of-the-house after they were married. An impossible man to live with. For five years she had tried to make a go of it; then they had separated.

But the difficult truth was that, living apart from him, *not divorced,* she had finally fallen in love with her husband. An animal love perhaps, purely sensual. Yet their weekends together—they met frequently, usually at the halfway point of Los Angeles—had been a revelation, a new experience in pure passion. The memory of that passion sent a sharp stab of pain through her even now.

Grief and pain. They were real, and she closed her eyes against them as the sheriff began to tap his heel, an uneven, unpredictable beat (maddening) in the heat and silence of the room.

BARRY FIELDING shifted restlessly in his chair. How long was the sheriff going to keep them cooped up in the hell hole? He was dripping with sweat, filthy with it. Self-consciously he moved away from the girl beside him, not wanting to contaminate her by his touch.

It was more than sweat that made him feel dirty. It was hate. Hate was an obscene emotion; and for as long as he could remember he had lived with hate. First the dim and dull hatred for his father when the old man had started his downhill skid into alcoholism.

Then the shift of hatred—it was a relief—toward the as-yet-unknown force that had caused his father's defeat. And finally the whetting of the hatred when the proper object was found, when he learned that Cal Yonkers had tricked his father out of the Countess Zee mine in a ruthlessly unprincipled way.

The Countess Zee wasn't much of a mine and it was a strange Cal Yonkers had bothered to acquire it. But in time the loss had killed his father. And then Cal shut down the mine entirely, depriving Barry of the trickle of royalties that had

paid for his books and his clothes while he was in high school.

All right, he'd thought defiantly. I'll get to college even so. I'll get a job, work my way through. At that point he was offered the scholarship; and who would have dreamed of turning down a scholarship from the San Pedro County Men's Club?

For almost four years he worked and studied, gradually but not entirely forgetting the sting of hate. In his senior year he learned that the Men's Club, to which he was theoretically indebted for the scholarship, was in fact one man alone—Cal Yonkers.

Restitution for the Countless Zee shutdown? For one blissful week, in his naivete, he had thought so. But Cal Yonkers was not a man to hide his light indefinitely. He very soon presented his bill: undying gratitude, plus four years of postgraduate slavery. That was when Barry found out, the hard way, what money could buy.

And then the meaning of revenge was added to his fiercely revived store of hatred. I'll have my revenge someday, he promised himself. It will be all the sweeter for having been postponed.

But *was* revenge sweet, he asked now in the sheriff's office; and answered truthfully: not really. It's a bitter poisonous draft. The poison seeps into one's veins, as insidious as a narcotic. Seeps in, demands release. Blurs the vision.

He rubbed his hand over his eyes.

When he looked up a minute or so later the sheriff was tilted back in his chair. Mrs. Yonkers, white-faced and tight-lipped, was twisting a wisp of handkerchief in her fingers. Beside him Pat Greenway fumbled at her shirt pocket, drew out a cigarette.

"Light, please," she said, and he saw that she was trembling. Poor kid, Barry thought. She's too young to be tangled up in the ugliness of murder.

Yet she wasn't as young as she seemed. Under the tough tomboy pose he sensed that she was all woman—on the threshold of maturity, hesitant perhaps, but capable of giving a woman's love to the man who earned the right to it.

A queer sensation gripped him, an awareness of the girl, an awareness of love. Something that almost verged on love, and yet wasn't love. Could he, he wondered uneasily, after so many years in the rigid mold of hate, learn to substitute love for hate? Or was he eternally condemned to this sick hollowness, this absence of emotion, now that the pivot of his hatred was gone, now that Cal Yonkers was dead.

PAT GREENWAY inhaled deeply, fighting back the scream that threatened to tear the silence into shreds. Dear lord, she thought, why must we sit here, waiting,

waiting, with guilt and suspicion and dread fluttering around the room like so many ghosts, filling the air, heavy, unbreathable, the silence as heavy as the heat? Is this what it's like in a death cell on the night before the execution? Does one stop breathing ahead of time, before the walk into the gas chamber? Are guilt and fear more powerful than grief? Who can spare a moment of grief for a man who was

shot dead under the blaze of the morning sun?

I can spare a moment, she thought, the cigarette helping enormously to bring the tilting room back into focus. I can spare an interlude for grief. I will remember this man, Cal Yonkers, as he appeared to me when I was a child. Like an uncle. The sort of uncle who bought affection with lollipops and trips to Disneyland, but what was wrong with that? It wasn't *my* affection he was buying. He was buying Felicia.

She stole a look at Felicia, sitting there so quietly. But pale, shockingly pale—drained. As though the blood had been drained out of her. Was a vampire flitting around with the ghosts in the hot, unbreathable air?

Oh dear God, why had she thought of that?

She jumped to her feet, stubbed her cigarette out angrily in the ashtray on the sheriff's desk. No one said a word; three pairs of eyes followed her back to her seat.

She refused to answer the questioning, probing eyes. She refused to. She had something else to worry about—the image of the vampire she'd just conjured up out of her rape and her fear. There it was, right in front of her: *vampire.* Now look at it, she said to herself firmly; and then, very fast: vampire, a blood-sucking bat. And added more slowly: vampire, a woman who seduces a man by tricks and wiles. And finally pinpointed the image, grinning a little on the inside where it wouldn't show: *vamp,* a slinky, half-naked woman, dripping with pearls.

But lord, she'd done everything she could to be non-slinky, hadn't she? Pants, no lipstick, hair in a riotous mess, acting like a crazy teenager, even in front of Barry, during every minute of this gruesome visit. She'd done her best, hadn't she, to escape from pseudo-uncle Cal Yonkers?

He was neither uncle nor pseudo-uncle; he was her brother-in-law.

Yes, that was right. He was her

brother-in-law. Hang on to the legal relationship, Pat my girl, and forget those hot, heavy hands, forget the playful hugs that were not in the least playful. Forget the promise of the little MG, of a trip to Hawaii. Above all, forget the anger that bubbled into outrage: "You can't buy me! You can't, you *can't!*"

But she had known forever—when does knowledge of this kind begin?—that she was part of a package deal. Dimly she had known it as a child; and every time she had seen her brother-in-law since Carl and Felicia had separated the day of reckoning seemed more inevitable, closer.

Yesterday, or the day before, sulking over pre-dinner cocktails, she'd thought, why can't I just go riding off into a proper television sunset with someone? Perhaps with Barry?

That was yesterday or the day before. Today was the day of reckoning. The day when Cal Yonkers ended up nothing more than a body with a bullet—

She couldn't go on with it, and retreated frantically to firmer ground: *I can spare a moment of grief.*

But could she? Grief for a man who carried his own murder around with him, flaunting it like a banner, asking to be killed by his poor, squirming prey?

Dear lord, dear Barry, *somebody* hold my hand. Hold it tight.

THE SHERIFF allowed his chair to drop forward with a sudden sharp noise. He stared at the three people facing him, and pondered the peculiar quirk of a human mind that would risk death in order to mete it out. For he knew beyond doubt that one of these three was a murderer. One of them had been pushed beyond the point of control and had reacted with violence. The question was, which one? Which one was strong enough to face the moment of violence—or weak enough to succumb to its temptation?

But before he could pursue this line of thought, the fourth creature in the room, the ghost of Cal Yonkers, demanded its share of attention.

All right then, the sheriff said to himself. I will pay heed to Cal Yonkers, the only truly evil man I have ever known. A man who, with neither a by-your-leave nor a thank-you, quite simply took whatever struck his fancy, and just as simply discarded the object or person when its usefulness was over. A man who was a thoughtless despoiler, subsequently finding a perverted pleasure in observing the lives he had ruined; and finally a man who, in his selfish thoughtlessness, was a positive genius at undermining another man's pride.

This was Cal Yonkers; and here facing him were Cal's victims. The sheriff looked at Felicia Yonkers, the widow, a woman still beauti-

ful in her mid-thirties. Beautifully dressed, beautifully self-contained. But, he'd be willing to bet, with a deep, dammed up passion under her calm exterior. Passion for good, or for evil?

Then he looked at the girl, Pat Greenway, an unkempt, almost embarrassingly graceless duplicate of her sister. Yet he had seen her a day or so ago out riding with Barry Fielding. A handsome couple, he'd thought. And a few minutes later had amended his opinion. The girl, galloping alone across the desert on one of the Yonkers' palominos, was magnificent, a miracle of fierce, young vitality. Too vital for the likes of a Barry Fielding?

He looked at Barry. An agreeable lad, with a proud tilt to his head. Or was it mere cockiness? After the death of his father—and this death could unquestionably be attributed to Cal Yonkers—had Barry's pride remained intact? Or had it curdled, as injured pride can, into hate? It was difficult to know.

These three—the woman, the girl, the young man. Each had had the opportunity to kill Cal Yonkers; each had had access to the gun that had been used for the murder. But which one had pulled the trigger?

The sheriff began to rock his chair back and forth, an inch at a time, deliberately adding one more ingredient to the tension in the room—a monotonous, nerve-racking squeak. He was playing on the nerves of his suspects now, subjecting them to the strain of waiting for a report on the gun which, he knew, would prove nothing beyond what was already a matter of record.

The gun was registered in Felicia Yonkers' name, and it had been found half a mile from the arroyo where Cal was killed. There were no fingerprints on it; and no amount of testing would prove or disprove Felicia's statement that it had been missing from her car that morning. Still, the waiting was necessary. The sheriff, who was fully aware of the value of scientific techniques in the solution of a crime, nonetheless frequently relied on intuition.

It was intuition that had prompted him to collect the three suspects in one room, and make them wait under conditions that were as trying as possible—although he was beginning to regret his inspiration to disconnect the perfectly good air-conditioning unit. He was as uncomfortable as the rest of them.

But perhaps not. The woman seemed to be suffering most acutely from the heat. She no longer looked as beautiful, as self-contained as she had five minutes ago. In contrast, the girl seemed to have lost a certain harshness. It was as though the beauty they shared as a family heritage had become subtly unbalanced, drain-

ing away from the older sister in order to enhance the younger one.

Suddenly the sheriff leaned forward, put his elbows on the desk, and very carefully made a temple of his fingers. A clue was jangling his nerves now, teasing him, pulling at him. Some thought he had had, and lost. If he went back, retraced his steps, could he find it again?

Barry Fielding. Injured pride leading to revenge? Perhaps. But he didn't think that was what he was looking for.

Pat Greenway, magnificent on a horse. Injured innocence striking back blindly at a seen or unseen demon? Could be, but—

Felicia Yonkers. She'd been separated from her husband for ten years, yet Cal's name had never been coupled with another woman's. Strange. Very strange. Indicative of the attraction she still had—

And then the answer came to him, sharp and clear. Pat, the graceless duplicate of her sister. But she wasn't graceless. She was Felicia with the bloom of youth, the Felicia of fifteen years ago. She was a mint-fresh version of the girl Cal Yonkers had married.

The sheriff was ready to break the silence at last. He framed his question with great care: "Mrs. Yonkers," he said softly in the tense, waiting heat of the little room, "how come you and your late husband never got yourselves a divorce?"

For a moment she said nothing. Then, with only a trace of breathlessness, "We were quite satisfied with the arrangement we had worked out."

"Both of you?"

"Of course," Her eyes flickered briefly toward her wide-eyed sister.

"But this visit was different, wasn't it, Mrs. Yonkers?" the sheriff said, pressing softly, inexorably on the spot he was sure now was the vulnerable one. "This time your late husband asked you—"

"Who told you?" she cried. "How could you possibly know?"

"—asked you for a divorce," he finished firmly. "Because he—"

Her voice was harsh and ragged against the heat. "Because he wanted to marry *her!* Not somebody else—Pat. Me, all over again. Same make, new model. Trading me in on a new model. As though I were a car. But I'm not! I'm not so old. I'm not, I'm not, *I'm not!*"

Her pitiful scream of denial was as good as a signed confession, the sheriff thought sadly. And marveled that injured vanity could lead to violence, too.

3 BACK COPIES FOR ONLY $1

You May Have Missed
These Three MIKE SHAYNE Stories

If you've just discovered MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE you may not have read any of the previously published issues. And if you are a real dyed-in-the-wool Shayne fan—and who isn't?—you'll want to read them. We have a limited supply left of some of these back copies and they are yours—by filling out the conveniently printed coupon. Each issue also contains—besides a new Mike Shayne adventure—short stories, novelets and short novels by prominent writers in the mystery, crime and detective story field.

No. 1 . . . KILL WITH CARE by Brett Halliday **(May 1964)**
"They tell me I've just killed a man," Tim Rourke told Mike Shayne on the phone, giving the redhead quite a jolt. And that was just the start of a homicide case that was a newspaperman's nightmare.

No. 2 . . . SCREAM BY NIGHT by Brett Halliday **(June 1964)**
A scream in the night, followed by the strangest of sounds made the famed Miami private eye, on a holiday of his own, wonder how many tourists in Trinidad carried crime insurance.

No. 3 . . . ALIBI FOR A KILLER by Brett Halliday **(July 1964)**
Shayne, being human, couldn't deny that he'd allowed a pretty girl to sway him. But when he found himself being eased into a tight spot in a diabolical murder—the rugged redhead went into high gear.

RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC.
160 West 46th St., New York, N. Y. 10036

Please send me the three back copies of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE I enclose $1.00 in full payment. Remit by check, Money order, or cash.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY, STATE, ZIP NO. .....

Please print NOV. 1965

PREMONITION OF EVIL

Helene Ramsey seemed guilty of murder as charged. But innocence and guilt can sometimes blend . . . in a most peculiar way.

by JAMES O'CONNOR SARGENT

THE YELLOW MOON, drifting behind low-hanging clouds over Port Campbell, added to Helene Ramsay's melancholy as she turned her Pontiac from the main highway toward the ocean. She couldn't know it, but this was the last time she'd ever make the trip from that cluster of Navy mansions on the ocean, up the escarpment to where she and Alan had built their home, with its towering sweep of everything below it.

Around midnight, an hour or so ago, a premonition of evil had stirred in Helene's breast. She had wanted to cut free then, but Admiral Jorgenson had button-holed her in that muggy alcove, sounding her out on his prediction of an eventual war, preposterous as he must have known it to be, between the United States Fleet and the growing Panamanian Navy.

Jorgenson had served under her father, or maybe it had been her grandfather. He treated her unctuously like a Saint Bernadette with

a private line to the nautical part of Heaven, asking her opinion on naval matters, as though she could tap the answers at random in her genes.

She had broken lose from him, trying to find a breath of air in the breezeway, where Major Nelson's pseudo-lustful pawing of her body had taken place. She felt sorry for the young Army Major, now so hard-pressed to prove that he was normal after last month's alleged incident at the bandstand, that he had taken to using his fingers like nervous little grasshoppers about the anatomy of every lonely wife.

Helene eased her foot onto the accelerator, increasing the car's speed to 60, opening a window to take in the flower and salt scent of the late September night. Of course, the children were all right. Gregory was an independent 10-year-old, perfectly capable of looking after 8-year-old Denise. But she thought of the possibility of fire, scanning the smokeless sky with relief.

There had been recent reports of prowlers even up this high. And who knew what manner of pervert worked down there in the shipyards or at the airfield, their danders exploding over automation cutbacks, and over reports that the military installations might be phased out?

When she reached the new strip of macadam road, where some dog of a realtor never should have been permitted to erect these ghastly identical ramblers for a new generation of pretentious snobs, she had the car at 70, as though she had absorbed her husband's need for rushing through here at breakneck speed, imagining it was still forest, and not wanting to recognize what he called democracy's big vomit.

Alan was the worst snob of all, born to nothing but a handsome face, probably even the son of a sharecropper. But he had been born in the right country, at the right time, and World War II had made him. War, plus his P-51, plus a certain amount of native pluck had made Alan Ramsay. And now the sharecropper's son, with the handsome face, was a full Colonel—retired.

Helene felt her lips parting at the humor of it—to be wasting time tonight, thinking of this venial sin. But now when all the fights, accusations, infidelities, threats, and shame of it were at an end, Alan's snobbery stood out. Lord, what joy she must have given him that night thirteen years ago when she accepted his diamond! No Irish mother of two priests and four nuns could have been as proud as Alan when he was able to tell everybody that he was marrying the daughter of an Admiral.

Oh, it wasn't the snobbery one met in this far country of rank pulling; it was snobbery's capacity for involving you, for putting a pall over you if you felt no need to look down on everybody else. After

thirteen years of marriage to Alan Ramsay, Helene understood.

Everything. The things the Admirals had never told her, the things she hadn't learned at school here or in Switzerland. Life with Alan Ramsay had been the real education, but an education for what?

For taking over some crime syndicate? For operating a string of profitable brothels with international headquarters in Paris?

You never fell in love with Helene Camrose, Alan. You never even could see me. You looked at me and saw instead John Paul Jones unfurling his colors, or Dewey entering Manila Bay.

Too late, Helene saw the tricycle that Timmy O'Neil had abandoned where the road veered into the driveway, the cacophony bizarre as she applied brakes, her wheels crunching onto the dirt road, the tricycle still in tow.

Somehow, she had shaken the tricycle free by the time she had to climb. Up here, the wind seemed chillier. She had the car crawling at 20, so she could pick up the mink stole beside her, throwing it about her shoulders, nerves splintering when the right front wheel tossed a pebble against the windshield.

Her head was throbbing, but she knew that this wasn't a result of Jorgenson's over-ginned martini's, but rather from the vicious gossip tossed back and forth by the cats, capable of jumping from diaper rash and clam dip to the only topic which interested them —fornication. For a moment, she saw again their smoldering eyes feasting on morsels of bread, which they rubbed frantically between their long-nailed fingers, lacquered bloodily, and when their hooped-skirt minds stopped swinging all about their only interest, actually touching the juicier tidbit about Colonel Benton or Commander Gould's Italian wife. She noticed how their fingers moved more frenziedly, and how the morsels of garlicy breadbit went popping into their mouths when the time came to simulate shock, disbelief, offense.

She was sure that they had watched her for some sign tonight. How had La Mertens put it? "I hear Captain Hoagland is retiring next month? Strange that he's never re-married, with dear Dorothy dead three years now?"

Why hadn't she answered, "Yes, Hoagy's retiring and settling in Florida—" instead of permitting the great rush of martini to burn her throat, bringing on that childish need to cough? For after all, they knew that Hoagy had been her father's aide. If anybody would know Hoagy's plans, she would.

AS THE PATIO lights, which she had left burning for herself, came into view, she made a mental note that she must call Chief O'Neil and

own up to wrecking Timmy's tricycle. For some unaccountable reason, she glanced at her wristwatch, noticing that it was 1:15 a.m. She'd mention this fact to the police.

She eased the Pontiac from the dirt road, past the chinaberry tree, and onto the concrete driveway, surprised to see that Alan's station wagon was there.

She used her key to open the front door; and again, for an unaccountable reason, she turned, letting the early-morning breeze beat about her temples, which she was sure were feverish. Insect and animal sounds came to her ears. She shivered a little, but still, she removed the mink stole before going into the house.

These were some of the details she would remember about the evening when they moved her from Murderer's Row to the Death House—the little things, which hadn't been questioned by the police or prosecution. Like the mournful cry of some furry creature for his mate, or the way shadows of death seemed to steal across the ghostly stillness, and the small whispery sound that the surf made as it fell away from the rocks behind the house. She closed the door on the night, bolting it.

First, she went to Denise's room, her pudgy daughter raising a face of angelic innocence up from the pillow. Next, she checked on Gregory, sleeping the sleep of the heavily fatigued, his football on the dresser.

She was about to check on the babysitter, when she remembered that Freda had gone to visit her sick aunt. Freda had been called a 'mother's helper,' by the nuns who had placed her with Helene a month ago. Now, she'd have to get rid of the girl, for Alan's sake, even if it turned out that there really was a sick aunt in town.

As she passed Alan's room, she lent her ear to his snoring. She moved along the hall to the front bedroom. She put on all the lights, drawing the draperies, and studying herself in a succession of mirrors. She had just been cursed with her 35th birthday, and didn't want to look any older, not a day, if she could help it.

With a hand on the flat of her stomach, she tossed her blonde head, deciding that the pageboy was too severe for her thin-featured face. They used to say she had the finely-chiseled face of the aristocrat, but Helene was rather certain that such a face became sort of hatchety in old age, a pinched look taking over around 45, and not enough flesh to fall anywhere at 55. For a moment, she closed her eyes, hugging her shoulders, needing to believe in her future, her lips recapturing something of the bruised rawness she had felt two months ago.

She had a need to read his letters, finding the key to her locked

secretary, and then the dozen or so letters from him.

She removed her girdle, dress, and slip, and was lifting her negligee from the closet when the phone tingled beside her bed, and gave off a jarring sound from farther along the hall. She was baffled by a call at this time of morning, hesitating with the earlier premonition of evil upon her. When she picked up the receiver, she heard Alan's groggy voice already answering.

How many times during the terror-ridden months that followed would she wish she had listened to that conversation?

He came to her door a few minutes later, stifling a yawn. "Just wanted to make sure you got home all right," he said.

She felt naked in the sheer nightgown which clung to her thin frame. His pajamas seemed more green than blue, confirming her earlier feverish condition. "Of course, I got home all right."

He ran his hand through the still-black hair, eyeing her curiously, even giving off the charming smile which once had meant something to her. Now, it was no more than a nervous tick.

She faced him coldly, wanting him to go, for she knew a side of him that belonged in the Kinsey Report. Sessions with other women had often driven him back to her arms in the middle of the night, before she had fully understood that lust fed itself and carried inner protections against atrophy.

"Don't worry about that letter from Gregsy's teacher," he said. "I'll see her tomorrow or the next day."

She admired the casualness of him at this time of morning, but she hated taking up his topic. "Some children have difficulty changing schools. After all, there were seven schools in six years," she said.

"You changed school as often when you were a child," he said, grinning. She felt that he was seeing her as Old Ironsides, steaming into some Lake Erie port back in 1812.

"Yes, I did. And right now, I'm terribly tired, Alan." She smiled. She'd remember that and be glad of it.

"Well, goodnight, Helene. I'm

sorry about last Saturday. It's okay with us now, isn't it?"

She should have smiled then, so that he might have died thinking that there was some chance for him in her life. But she merely closed the door. "Goodnight, Alan."

He had spoiled the reading of the letters for her, so she returned them to the secretary. As she put out the lights, the premonition of evil seemed to have followed her, even now when she knew the children were safe. But she let her head find some groove on the silken pillow. She was sure that she dozed, the ring of the phone, if it had rung again, unable to fully arouse her.

IT TOOK THE blasts of the pistol to shake Helene out of her sleep. She jumped out of bed, instantly awake. In the hallway, she saw that lights burned downstairs in the foyer, and the outside door was being whipped back and forth by the wind.

As she started down the stairs, she heard Alan's moaning, saw him writhing on the floor, blood covering the lapel pocket of his pajama top. The stench of seared flesh and of spent powder nauseated her. Smoke seemed to emanate from the .45 Colt Alan held in his right hand, and the bullet he had fired would be located by police near the chinaberry tree within a few hours. "Help me, Helene," he gasped.

Helene heard other voices beyond the door, a man and a woman, and the urge to protect her children was stronger than fear. Lifting the Colt from Alan's hand, she had turned on the lawn lights, firing the Colt blindly, almost certain she had hit the bushy-haired man and noticing the beehive hairdo of the woman, the two of them racing in noisy panic across the lawn, making for a car on the dirt road.

Again, Helene fired the Colt and the woman screamed, dropping her smoking .38 Police Special. The car, ignited meanwhile, started down the escarpment.

Helene was picking up the smoking .38 and carrying both pistols into the foyer. "It all seemed so unreal," she told the police. "I knew I must get help, and yet my knees were buckling. I think I wanted to faint and still hear what Alan was saying. I put my ear next to his lips, and he said, 'They shot me, darling.'

" 'Who, Alan?' I begged stupidly, for there was a great amount of blood, and with horror, I saw where his hand gloved in his loin was even bloodier." She looked away from the bland face of Detective Lieutenant Ray Marvolian.

"I was afraid that the noise had awakened the children. I didn't want them to come downstairs and see their father like that."

"So you locked their doors from the outside?" Marvolian asked.

"I didn't lock their doors. I was surprised that the police found the bedroom doors locked. I ran to the phone in the kitchen, begging the operator to put me through to the police. I heard Denise calling to me, and that brought on something like panic. I rushed back to Alan. I think I called up the stairs to Denise to stay up there. Anyway, I knew that Alan was dead."

"How did you know that, Mrs. Ramsay?"

"Well, the great amount of blood and his eyes open like that." A shiver was shaking her body. "How could any man have survived a butchering like that?"

"You mentioned mimosa perfume, Mrs. Ramsay?

"Yes, I seemed to get whiffs of it. But I wasn't certain whether the woman left it trailing behind or whether it came from—"

"Your husband's pajamas, Mrs. Ramsay?"

"I shouldn't have said that, Mr. Marvolian. But you're going to find out that my husband knew many women. I remember I bolted the door. I was afraid that those horrible murderers were still out there. Because after all, I had their gun, and the police would be able to trace it. I was sick to my stomach by the time your men arrived."

Helene must have repeated this five times in as many days. Besides the local police, the Air Force was interested, since Alan had so recently retired. The Navy felt that they were automatically involved in anything that happened at Port Campbell.

Helene's sister, Myra, and her brother-in-law, Navy Captain Roy Pelletier, flew from Formosa. They took charge of the children. Also, they took Helene's place by the casket of the wartime Ace. She wished she could have given Alan a Viking's funeral, such as described in *Beau Geste*. Somebody should have been at the grave to recite, *The Soldier of the Legion,* which was the only poem Alan had ever bothered to memorize in some far-away Georgia classroom. Or Magee's, *High Flight,* would have been more appropriate than the grotesque congregational rendition of *Abide With Me.*

Roy Pelletier had insisted on keeping the newspapers from Helene the first few days. When Helene awakened from drugged sleep to ask what progress the police were making in locating Alan's murderers, it was Captain Pelletier who had the answer. "They shouldn't have any difficulty, not with your excellent description of those dreadful people, and that .38 you picked up. It was like solving their case for them."

"I can still see her beehive hairdo, Roy. If only I could have gotten the license of their car. Roy, I'm terribley worried. You know the kind of private life Alan lived! Must it all be raked up now?"

"Well, that's the hell of it, Helene. I'm afraid it must."

"I can imagine, Roy. Handsome, playboy type, wartime Ace, every woman's husband. That's what they used to say about Alan, you know?"

Roy Pelletier nodded uncomfortably when Helene mentioned, "It was so brutal, Roy!"

Roy's face went whiter. How often, Helene wondered, could just reading about a murder cause a man's lips to whiten. Quite often, surely. For if every man spent a large part of his life chasing ghosts who would emasculate him, the spectacle of the real McCoy must bring shivers of identification, and more genuine ghosts by night.

What a juicy tidbit for the wives down below, Helene thought bitterly. "Oh, why don't they find those dreadful people, Roy?" Helene demanded on the fourth day.

THE POLICE hadn't been idle. They had matched up the six bullets in Alan Ramsay's body with the .38 Police Special, and recovered those fired wild by Alan and Helene from the .45 Colt. They had taken testimony from dozens of people, who had known the Ramsays.

On the fifth day, Marvolian returned. Myra Pelletier awakened Helene. "Do you feel like talking to Marvolian again, Helene?" she asked.

"Of course. Is he here?"

Roy Pelletier came into Helene's bedroom. She threw back the covers, checking her appearance in the mirror as Myra brought a robe. "Have they found those people?" she asked.

"They've traced the .38, Helene, to Admiral Jorgenson's home. It's the pistol that the Admiral gave his wife for protection two years ago. Anybody could have stolen it the night of the party. There were a great many guests."

Helen swung around, lipstick in hand. "My God, Roy, are you saying that I could have taken it? There were dozens of people at that party!" A line of bitterness crossed her face. "Including too many who slept with Alan," she went on quickly. "They crawled into bed with him across the world. But I don't want to start mentioning names. Oh God, don't let me be the one who mentions names!"

When she got downstairs, she saw Marvolian and one of his assistants examining a painting she had brought back from Portugal. "Surely, somebody saw that murder car coming up and down the escarpment," was her opening remark to Marvolian.

"Well, it was quite late, Mrs. Ramsay. Most of the people would have been sleeping. A few did recognize the sound of your Pontiac, probably because they're familiar with it. And, of course, Mrs. O'Neil heard you hit Timmy's tricycle. Mrs. Ramsay, when you returned

from town that evening, did you ring the bell or use your key?"

"I told you I used my key." Then, the implication of his question hit her like a ton weight. "How dare you? How dare you ask me a question like that?"

"Then, let me ask you another, Mrs. Ramsay? Why were the doors of your children's bedrooms locked from the outside?"

"I answered that, Mr. Marvolian. I told you that I didn't know. But let us assume that my husband locked the doors? After all, we know that Alan had that strange phone call, that he went downstairs, armed with his Colt. Can't we assume that he wanted to protect his children against whomever might have been on the other side of that door?"

Marvolian worried his lower lip. "Well, you see, we have no witnesses that it happened that way. Only your word." He told her that the .38 had been traced to the Jorgenson home. He reminded her that she had been at the Jorgenson home the night of the murder. "Did you at any time phone this house that evening, Mrs. Ramway, threatening your husband?"

Roy Pelletier stepped forward. "I think you've asked enough questions, Sir. I don't want my sister-in-law to answer any more of your questions until Aubrey Sims arrives." Turning to Helene, Roy told her that he had asked the young lawyer to watch out for Helene's interests as the investigation continued.

"Lawyer?" Helene asked. "Do I need a lawyer? Something's awfully wrong."

"Mrs. Ramsay," Marvolian said, "I regret my need to ask you these questions. I think it's wise of you to retain counsel."

It took Helene a moment to reply. "I'd be worried, Mr. Marvolian, only the idea is too absurd. I have confidence in scientific police work. This is the United States. I believe that the wrong person is seldom arrested for murder. You'll find that car. The fingerprints of that woman will be on the .38." Her voice rose slightly. "Or was she wearing gloves? Naturally, I had no gloves on. I had just gotten out of bed. They will find the murderers, won't they Roy?"

"Of course they will, Helene. Please don't worry."

"We're certainly working hard to prove your story," Marvolian said. "Try to trust me, Mrs. Ramsay. I'm not your enemy."

The lawyer, Aubrey Sims, drove up as Marvolian was speaking. Myra Pelletier went to the door to admit him. There was an atmosphere of good feeling for a moment—until Marvolian turned to Helene.

"Mrs. Ramsay, I have to ask you to accompany me now. You are being held for the murder of Alan Ramsay on the morning of September the twenty-third. You will

have opportunity at the station house to consult with your lawyer, and from then on, anything you say that is made a matter of record may be used at your trial."

The story Helene Ramsay put on record veered not one iota from its original.

Alone with Aubrey Sims, Helene told more. "I hate to begin mentioning names, but consider the manner in which Alan was murdered. Consider the way he lived. If the Police have been investigating, I'm sure they have heard everything that I could tell you or them about Alan and women. Or almost everything. Do they know that Alan was shot by an irate husband three years ago? Nothing serious, just in the leg.

"I was rather protected up there on the pedestal, Aubrey, but let us think of women and of their husbands, who didn't have that protection? Aubrey, encourage Marvolian to put me on the lie detector. At least, when he sees that I'm telling the truth, perhaps he'll begin running down that man and woman."

"Helene, you must not think that the police aren't continuing their investigation. Your family has counted for much in this town. Without the Navy, there wouldn't have been any Port Campbell, and without your grandfathers the whole situation here might have been quite different."

"Aubrey, I wouldn't have believed it possible. I did not believe that an innocent person could be held on a Murder One charge. Do you realize what they've done? They've written themselves a Hollywood script. If only they'd find that woman."

"Helene, I feel I should tell you that they're bringing Captain Hoagland's name into it."

"Hoagy? What has Hoagy to do with it? He was in Europe."

"Oh, those damn gossips down there mentioned his name. They've seen you out with Hoagy and the police feel that the fact he was coming back here to retire, and that he'd be settling in Florida next month is part of your motivation. They'll imply that you and Alan discussed a divorce, that Alan, by the very nature of his philandering, wanted no divorce."

"Of course, Alan and I discussed divorce, a long time ago. As a matter of fact I've admitted that to Marvolian. Aubrey, you've got to find that car, the bushy-haired man, the beehive hair-do woman. You've got to begin with the Jorgenson party on the night of the murder and find out who stole that .38. Because, before God, and on any lie detector test, I picked that gun up off the lawn of my home, where that dreadful woman had dropped it."

LIEUTENANT MARVOLIAN put Helene on the polygraph. Her story checked out in her favor, and

a veritable purgatory began for Ray Marvolian. Even though Marvolian and Sims showed the results of Helene's testimony on the lie detector to District Attorney Egan, all three of them naturally knew that such evidence was inadmissible in Court.

Marvolian stepped up his investigation, working his assistants around the clock. Helene placed assets worth twenty thousand dollars in Sims hands so that a reward for information about the car, .38, and the murderers as described might be offered.

Mrs. Perkins had seen a strange car with Florida or maybe California tags. Mr. Adams, who had been fired by the Navy for pilfering, had seen two cars go up the escarpment at almost the same time, one of which was the accused's Pontiac. Young Jennie Verduin, who had just dropped out of high school, and whose application at a Crittenden Home was being processed, had seen a Lincoln Continental going up the escarpment at midnight.

Mrs. Cassidy, who ran the hardware store on Plymouth Street, was sure that the beehive hair-do described by the accused, was the same one who had come into her store with a Spanish accent. And hadn't Colonel Ramsay been stationed in Spain a few years back? "You know how those Latins are for a blood vendetta—"

Six months after the murder, Helene went to trial. The Jorgensons, called by the Prosecution to identify the murder weapon, tried to be helpful under cross examination by the Defense. Admiral Jorgenson said that of the eighteen women present in his home that night, Helene Camrose Ramsay would have been the last to steal the .38. He made an imposing witness. Granddaughters of Admirals just didn't become murderers, no matter what the provocation. He looked directly at the eight men and four women in the jury panel as he said this.

Both Prosecution and Defense wondered how many on the Jury realized that it was Jorgenson, who had written the fatal report, recommending that Port Campbell be phased out in Defense Department reduction schemes. Like the murdered man, Jorgenson was about to go into real estate.

Mrs. Jorgenson wanted to talk about Helene's beautiful South Carolinian mother, her Castilian grandmother. The Judge became impatient. She was to answer only questions put to her. Yes, her husband had given her the .38; there were prowlers about.

Ballistics experts discussed the two pistols at length. All of the bullets removed from the deceased had come from the .38. None from the .45.

Several military wives had been subpoenaed on the basis of thier gossip to the police. Yes, there

were rumors that the Ramsay marriage was breaking up. But not because of infidelities on the part of the deceased; rather, there had been talk that Captain Hoagland and the accused—"

Defense felt a need to cross examine these trouble makers, establishing the fact that gossip surrounding the Ramsays through the years would most generally have been linked to Alan, the rake. "Isn't it true, Mrs. Porter, that his wartime squadron was known as the sexy Five-Two-Eight? And that it was said of Alan Ramsay that he was 'every woman's husband'?"

Mrs. Porter and Mrs. Crawling had to admit that the accusation was true.

The women had no difficulty remembering all the old scandals about Alan. After all, he hadn't married until he was in his thirties. With the Prosecution slowly weaving Helene's motive, Defense felt some need to blacken the character of Alan Ramsay. The military wives rose to his challenge and helped. It was then Defense noticed that Prosecution was rather silent; and the effect of this character assassination on the Jury burst upon Aubrey Sims' conscious too late.

Of course, you weren't supposed to speak ill of the dead. All of these good, middle class people had learned that as children. A wartime Ace. The damage had been done; and when it was all over, what really counted with the Jury was the gossip about the accused and Captain Hoagland.

Hoagland was called by the Prosecution. He made a poor witness, avoiding any admission of his love for Helene. But nobody in Court was fooled. Love was evident in his eyes, in his anger. The Prosecution worked away at his temper, making something of the fact that he had known Helene all of her life, that he had been aide to her father, that he had been widowed three years ago and hadn't remarried.

Battered, buffeted, he was no match for the silver-tongued Egan —yes, damn it, he was in love with Helene Ramsay. Yes, damn it, they had discussed marriage. Of course, that meant she would have divorced Ramsay, but Good Lord, she had plenty of reasons for divorcing Ramsay.

Prosecution reminded the Jury that Alan Ramsay wasn't on trial. He hadn't murdered anybody. He had limited his killing to wartime, to the enemies of the United States.

Sims was hard-pressed to convert any of Hoagland's testimony. "Captain Hoagland, you have stated that you have known Mrs. Ramsay all of her life. Is she capable of any murder, much less one as brutal as that described by the Prosecution in his opening remarks?"

"Of course not. Any fool would know better."

The best witness for the Defense was young Major Nelson. He omitted to say that he had tried to make love to Helene that night. It would have been libelous, certainly objectionable if the Prosecution had brought up anything about the alleged moral offense at the bandstand seven months ago in an effort to discredit this witness. Moreover, there in Court for all the world to see sat the new Mrs. Nelson, heavy with child, a plain, determined, big-boned woman, building within her a monument to Nelson's moral rectitude.

Nelson had not only talked to the accused in the breezeway, but he had escorted her to her car, and offered to drive her home. A .38 would not have fitted in her small evening bag. Indeed, he had held the bag in his hands on two occasions; he knew plenty about the weight of a .38. No, she did not leave him after he had held her bag. She was carrying nothing that night but her light-weight bag and her mink stole. The gracious lady he had put in her car was certainly not en route to do murder. As a matter of face, he recalled how she had asked him to cocktails the following Saturday, in case he and Alan played golf.

Mrs. Jorgenson, listening to Nelson's testimony, remembered something. She, too, had held Helene's handbag that evening. ". . . while Helene was siphoning soda into her cocktail. Don't you think they should have asked me that question? Come to think of it, Helene was nowhere near my room that evening, but Mrs. Potter and Mrs. Gaskil were. And they both have beehives."

"My Dear," the Admiral admonished. "Of course, Helene never took that pistol. Any moment now, the Judge will throw this out."

AFTER THE SECOND day of trial, Sims assured Helene that her testimony on the polygraph, while inadmissible, had not been in vain. Marvolian was still investigating, even if Egan was sure. "What worries me, Helene, is that Jury. I can't let you go into the witness box; and frankly, if you were to change your plea to self-defense, I think I might be able to get you off with a light sentence. It's no secret now what Alan put you through."

Helene insisted on taking the stand in her own defense. She seemed fully in control, assured, not a woman fighting for her life. While being cross-examined by the Prosecution, she managed three different references to her session on the lie detector. These were stricken from the record. She called upon God to witness that the first time she saw the .38 was when the woman dropped it on the lawn. One of the newspapers gave Helene 'A' for her memory of insignificant details about the murder night.

"She's guilty," a troubled Marvolian told Sims. "But something's wrong." Again, he stepped up his investigation, but Egan laughed him out of his office.

"Listen, Ray, what difference does it make if she came home, rang the doorbell, and then blasted him? Or if she threw a pebble up at his window, awakening him? What matters is that woman stood in the doorway and fired six bullets into his body. Of course she maintains we've written a script. Well, she's written one, too. And maybe with these sophisticated murderers, it doesn't matter much what kind of a script we write. As long as we have the basic facts of motivation, weapon, opportunity."

Quietly, Helene admitted her love for Captain Hoagland. She couldn't figure out when she first came to love this man she had known most of her life. Yes, she and the deceased had discussed the possibility of a divorce. "Well, naturally, Alan didn't want one."

If only she could have testified that Alan had readily agreed to divorcing her, now that he was retired and about to begin a new career. But the aura of truth surrounded Helene Ramsay, making the Prosecution, Defense, and especially Marvolian more uneasy. She was the woman they'd remember long after they were retired and sitting in the sun, maybe even at the last moment, when life was departing their bodies, and some summing up of earthly work was about to take place.

Helene described again how she had lifted the Colt from Alan's hand, hearing voices beyond the door, knowing a fierce compulsion to defend her children at all costs, how she had gone out there and fired the Colt at the man and woman, how the woman had dropped the .38, and how she, Helene, had picked it up.

District Attorney Egan reminded the Jury during his summing up of each witness's testimony, how the murder weapon had been available to the accused in the home of close friends, how she had known of its availability for a long time. He regretted that the character of the deceased had been blackened in Court, but the more the Defense had attacked Alan Ramsay's character, he said, the more he built up the accused's motivation for murder, a motivation of long standing, and then brought to a crisis by her desperate love for Captain Hoagland, the anticipated retirement of Hoagland, the accused's fear that her lover at a distance might meet some other woman. Only by persuading her husband to give her a divorce, without scandal, without loss of her children's custody and respect, could Helene Ramsay hope to find relief.

"I believe statistics will bear me out in this age of statistics," Egan said. "If divorce were left to stray-

ing husbands, Reno, Mexico, and Alabama would have to shut down their divorce mills. That's the kind of man Alan Ramsay was, handsome, debonair, experienced, pursued by women, a hero, perhaps a war casualty where his morals were concerned. But he wanted no divorce. He had made a proper marriage, one he was proud of, and he intended to remain married.

"He was about to begin a new career; a review of bank statements showed that while he held his property at Port Campbell jointly with his wife, he was without ready cash for his initial investment in business. His wife had that cash, an inheritance from her father. Under no circumstances, did Alan Ramsay intend to be divorced.

"Now, you have heard several references to the love affair between the accused and Captain Hoagland. Oh, that's an entirely different matter. No pattern of infidelities in the lives of these two. When they fell in love, it was no passing fancy, such as all of Alan Ramsay's affairs had been.

"Perhaps what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. It's not for us to chastize this love under the circumstances. Perhaps love had been too long denied; we have heard each of them testify to long acquaintance, going back to the days when Hoagland was her father's aide, and the accused no

more than a child. He was older, married to another woman at that time. One wonders, Ladies and Gentlemen—"

There was an objection from the Defense; it was sustained.

"Again and again, Alan Ramsay denied the accused a dicorce. Panic was upon her. Hoagland was leaving, and at that point the accused decided upon murder!"

"That's not true!" Helene burst out, clearly agitated.

"What planning and plotting went into this vicious crime, Ladies and Gentlemen. She came up with a script, seemingly flawless, something out of Hollywood, complete with that bushy-haired man and a woman with a modern, up-to-date hair-do, such as a thousand women in town were sporting that night.

"All, all a tissue of lies! A plot, a script to confuse the police; and has she confused them? They've left no stone unturned in trying to

locate her characters. So much so, that while trying to locate the bushy-haired man, they stumbled upon, instead, one Captain Hoagland.

"The accused had made no mention of Captain Hoagland in her original script. He was assigned no role. Why do you think she threw in that bit about mimosa perfume? She wasn't sure whether it came from the non-existent woman, who supposedly had brought the murder weapon to her home, or from the deceased? Clever? That was to immediately start some line of reasoning in the mind of the police that Alan Ramsay was a rake, his various affairs through the years intended to throw the police off, send them all over on wild-goose chases.

"One of the newspapers has called this a sexual murder, the butchering of his very masculinity which had betrayed her again and again. Notice, she had a bushy-haired man outside her door, too, and supposedly the bushy-haired man was avenging some sexual offense committed by the deceased against his non-existent wife. Clever? No, stupid lies.

"You've heard references to phone calls. I'd like to ask the four ladies in the Jury box to lend their ears. How many wives would pick up the receiver of their phone at that unearthly time of morning and not at least be interested in who was calling?

"But when a man goes to his own door at that ungodly hour, carrying a weapon, I suspect it was because he had received a threatening call. And I think we know who made that call. Helene Ramsay, driving home in high spirits from her martini drinking, all inhibitions left behind in town. Destroying a little boy's tricycle when she was blinded by fury against her husband who had again and again refused her a divorce, murder in her heart, the stolen .38 Police Special in her car.

"Prowlers. We hear a lot about prowlers. We're told that wives of Admirals in our town need pistols for protection. If I recall, those two young men who hit the taxi driver in the head last month were wearing uniforms, the peeping Tom we've yet to ferret out is always in uniform we're told. These military people, who come and go, caring not a tinker's damn about this community. With their cocktail parties and scandals, they're forever accusing the good people of Port Campbell of prowling about.

"Alan Ramsay opened the door to murder, bestial murder, perpetrated not by any prowler, but by his own wife, who had abundant motivation. We are not trying any demure, inexperienced little lady fresh out of her finishing schools, but a mature woman of thirty-five, too experienced in the gay life of

La Dolce Vita. Wasn't that the name of that immoral movie we had to go to Court to stop showing in this town? *La Dolce Vita,* these Americans coming back from the slums of Rome, the dives of Paris, the cesspools of Japan, no longer very American, if you ask me, but a gang of sophisticated, amoral—

"Yes, this is a dirty story, and it had a dirty ending. Helene Ramsay had the motivation, she had the weapon, she seized the opportunity on that particular night. She killed her husband in cold blood to satisfy her own passion of the season, her new love affair with a man out of her past.

"Judge Culpepper, undoubtedly, will mention in his Charge to the Jury that Alan Ramsay's morals were never on trial here. What is at stake? Does any man or woman have the right to murder their spouse, merely because they want to marry another? Forget that she's a mother, for motherhood never carried the right to murder. Speak up for the law in this era of street crimes and general lawlessness. The law says that no man or woman has the right to take another human life. I ask you to find Helene Ramsay guilty as charged. And thank God, murder most foul is still punishable by death in our State!"

Defense was inept. That would be said by everybody covering the Ramsay Case. Sims tried to make something out of Nelson's testimony that the murder weapon was not on the person of the accused. He said the police had failed to do their job. Somebody had to bring that murder weapon to the Ramsay door; somebody should have been located by the police, who had seen the bushy-haired man, the beehive woman, the car.

Sims' final plea for Helene's life smacked of fear of the Jury rather than of any belief in her innocence.

The Jury required nine hours to reach its verdict—guilty as charged.

FOR THOSE WHO loved Helene Ramsay, the next year passed slowly, a series of new investigations, of waning belief in her innocence, of appeals made and denied. Investigations blackened still more the character of the murdered man, but they failed to improve the position of the accused.

For Helene, the months dragged. She was certain, at first, that investigations would turn up the bushy-haired man and his woman. Somebody would come forth with a description of that car.

As a matter of fact, a bushy-haired man, arrested for armed robbery 400 miles away, admitted having been in Port Campbell that September. Marvolian had flown to interview him. The man had once worked at Port Campbell and his path could have crossed with that of the murdered man. Addi-

tional checking proved, however, that he hadn't been in Port Campbell the night of the actual murder. He was a liar, of course, denying any knowledge of the Ramsay murder and of the armed robbery for which he was ultimately convicted.

Marvolian saw Helene often. At times, she believed that the policeman was more concerned than her lawyer. Marvolian wanted to hear more about that night. There were rumors that every now and then, he had somebody new in his office for questioning.

"I never believed that innocent people could be executed," Helene told him.

"They're not, Mrs. Ramsay."

"Why do you come here if you believe I'm guilty?" she demanded.

To Sims, Helene said, "I don't think you really believed my story, Aubrey. I should have had another lawyer."

From the death house, she wrote a last letter to Myra and Roy Pelletier, advising them on certain things about rearing her children. "One thing, for the sake of Gregory and Denise," she wrote, "you must always remain alert to the truth that a man and woman came to the door that night, that they had already shot Alan by the time I got downstairs. Remember, too, the phone calls, because as I go to meet my Maker, I believe that truth will out."

The Pelletiers took Helene's letter to Sims and Marvolian, and then to the Governor, a disreputable politician, faced with a waning economy, with the phase out of the military installations, with an angry citizenry ready to change political affiliation in an effort to lessen crime in their State, and with a mounting anger against the military, who would soon depart with the loot of centuries, including the VA Hospital, for sunnier climates.

Under these pressures, the Governor had no profile of courage to show. Little did he suspect that his failure to question Egan's successful convictions would put Egan in the Governor's Mansion in three years.

Sometime after Helene entered the death house, where she would be remembered as the nicest of the seven women ever put to death by the State, she gave up all hope. She surrendered even a desire to live when she learned that Mrs. Potter's divorce had come through and that there was a strong rumor that Carol Potter was comforting Captain Hoagland.

She didn't bother to discuss this rumor with Hoagland when he visited her the last time. Nor did she get worked up over the fact that Mrs. Potter had been at the Jorgenson home that night and that she had been wearing a beehive hair-do. Why tell them? They knew. Carol Potter had no motiva-

tion for murdering Alan Ramsay, since her affair with him had hardly amounted to anything eight years ago. And even if Carol had killed Alan so that Helene would be accused, thereby opening the way to La Potter's vamping of Hoagland, how could anybody figure events that closely?

No, at the end, Helene was sure that the woman in the beehive hair-do hadn't been anybody familiar like Potter, Gaskil, the babysitter. It had been an unfamiliar couple, hurt by Alan in some secret affair, maybe a long time ago, and maybe it had been the sister and the brother of somebody cruelly hurt by Alan.

Just thinking about who the murderers were made her tired.

So she asked for martinis. She wanted them served very dry and in the proper glasses. The chaplain, sent to comfort her, would remember the martinis she had plied him with during the last few days.

Marvolian saw her the last morning. He was more troubled than Helene. "I've got to know," he said grimly. "For my peace of mind I know you're guilty. But—I've got to know." He didn't tell her that only a week earlier his wife had accused him unfairly of being in love with the prisoner.

"It was as I told you," Helene said proudly.

"Please tell me the truth, Mrs. Ramsay. How did it happen?"

She smiled faintly. "You said I stole the thirty-eight and used it."

HELENE RAMSAY was executed eighteen months to the day she had murdered her husband.

It was in that last hour of life that her mind wandered back to the night of the murder, and a thousand other details she had forgotten or not bothered to think about came to mind. She wondered why they hadn't believed her story, for it had happened that way. She wondered what the crime writers, from the legitimate sociologists to the scribbling ghouls, would make of her in the years ahead. Would the bushy-haired man and beehived woman ever talk? Turn on each other and seek Heavenly succor in some confession? For the sake of her children, Helene hoped so. At least, she had helped a little for the sake of the children.

She no longer cared about herself.

She should have realized that the premonition of evil which had ridden home with her that night was more than a mere premonition, rather an occult experience out of Jung, a moment of powerful awareness that everything would go wrong, that Alan would never agree to a divorce no matter how often she asked, that her future with Hoagy was not to be.

In the last fifteen minutes of her life, she felt very close to Alan, hearing his voice, the words the

same as he had spoken them that night, her ear to his lips "They've shot me, darling."

If only she could have identified the voices of the man and woman out there, as she opened the door, Alan's gun in her hand; and please God, let Gregory and Denise grow up knowing her urge to protect them from the murderers. Like poor Alan, locking the doors of the children's room before coming downstairs to answer the bell.

If only Alan had told her the names of the murderers.

Everything in life rights itself, she told herself; and she turned to the chaplain. "Death is the greatest righter of all, Father: Ending the misery, even if it must end the joy."

"Help me, Helene!" Alan had pleaded when she returned, carrying the Colt and the unfamiliar .38. "Call an ambulance. Those bastards have shot me."

Horror rose in Helene as she saw the blood oozing from the lapel pocket of his pajamas. "Well, don't stand there, damn it! Get me an ambulance! Do you want me to die?" he cried.

Helene had glanced at the .38, the strange murder weapon, which hadn't done murder at all. But would his girlfriend, whoever she was, be able to prove it? Why, of course, this was the premonition of evil: At long last, one of Alan's filthy affairs had backfired. What difference did it make if her prints were on the murder weapon. The other one's prints would be on it, too. It had all been so clear in her mind.

Something out of the finishing schools had remained with her, for she said, "I'm sorry, Alan!" as she pumped the other five bullets into him, at least two of them aimed where she felt he deserved them most.

Complete in the Next Issue

KILLER'S CORRIDOR

A Frances Bascom Ivy Novelet

by CHARLES VENTURA

The slaying seemed to have an aura of "Arsenic and Old Lace," except that the Madden's walled acres had a medieval look. But Ivy could take the unexpected in stride.

INNOCENT BYSTANDER

by LARRY MADDOCK
and
CORRIE HOWARD

Ryan was in a unique position to shine in the criminal enterprise field. But even an acknowledged expert runs a great risk when sex and business become intertwined.

A Masterful Crime Suspense Novelet

THE DAY Pete Ryan set his pattern for robbing the company payroll began like any other Monday: he was late to work. The guard waved in recognition as Ryan nosed his white Jaguar through the Bostic Corporation gate.

"Morning, Mr. Ryan. Didja have a nice weekend?" the man asked, then gaped at the bandage on Ryan's forehead.

Pete Ryan smiled sourly. "I wouldn't really call it nice, Charlie," he said, and drove through.

The main plant covered fourteen acres, three of which were for employee parking. He parked in the executive section, in the slot with *P. Ryan* stenciled on it.

Once inside the main building, he proceeded along a network of corridors to the door marked PURCHASING. Pausing to straighten his tie, he entered.

Sylvia Robb, a lush blonde in her mid-twenties, stared at him. "Pete! Your head!" she gasped. "What in the world happened?"

"Nothing to worry about, Robbie." He grinned, and touched the bandage gingerly. A lock of thick black hair curled rakishly over it. "I was having a quiet drink when the roof fell in, and I didn't duck in time. Any mail?"

"Today's Monday. Mail's late as usual. Were you hurt badly?"

"You worry too much, Robbie."

The girl frowned. "What's with the 'Robbie'? We're alone."

"After what happened this weekend," Pete Ryan said, "I think we'd better be more careful. You look delicious," he added.

Sylvia ignored the compliment. "Does Phyllis—?"

"She doesn't know it was you," he assured her. "But the fact that she found out it was anybody at all is damning enough. I've had to change quite a few of my plans."

"What do you mean?"

"You still worry too much, Robbie."

The door from the corridor opened, admitting Ralph K. Young, a slender man with receding gray hair. "I see you finally got here, Ryan," he snapped. "Now that you're no longer the favorite son, perhaps we can get some work done. What happened to your head? No, don't tell me—you fell off a bar stool."

"Not quite," Ryan corrected amiably. "I was just an innocent bystander, R. K., although I admit it did happen in a bar. I got clobbered with a beer bottle."

"You probably deserved it. I'm going to be tied up for a couple of hours in the plant but as soon as I get back I want an explanation of the Amco shipment records. I can't make heads or tails of them, but it looks like we've paid for about sixty tons we never received."

"Why, sure, R. K. It's all there if you know where to look. They started short-shipping early last summer, but we needed the stock, so I subbed the shortages through Midtown. It cost a couple of bucks, but Amco made it up on later shipments. That happened during your last vacation, I think. Anway, the Old Man okayed it, so stop worrying."

"Why wasn't it recorded, then?" R. K. asked.

"I'm sure it was," Ryan replied pleasantly. "Don't you think you're wasting time, chasing paper shortages? The stock's in the mill, that's what counts. All you've got to do is check it."

The older man glared at Pete Ryan, then vanished briefly into his own office, hurrying out shortly with a sheaf of invoices.

Sylvia waited until R. K. was gone. "What did he mean you're no longer the favorite son?" she demanded.

"I was just about to tell you,

sweetheart. Phyllis threw my ring back at me."

"That means no promotion. How are you going to—"

Ryan stopped her with a furtive kiss. "Don't worry your tinted head, pet. It simply calls for a change in tactics. Now, what's on the program for today?"

"Mr. Maltman's due in at ten," Robbie said. "I put the file on your desk."

Pete Ryan headed for his own office. "I'd appreciate it, Robbie, if you'd bring me a cup of coffee. And some aspirin."

"Yes, sir," she replied, smiling fondly.

Maybe it was the thick, black, curly hair that first attracted the girls he'd romanced. Without it, he reflected, he'd be only half as attractive and much more mature—like R. K. Pete Ryan chuckled at the mental image this evoked, then frowned at his superior's discovery of the Amco discrepancies. He'd foreseen this day, of course, and had prepared for it. Still, without the protection of his engagement to the boss's daughter, things might get a bit sticky.

THE OLDER MAN said, "All right," closing the folder on his desk and rubbing his eyes. "I see what happened. I doubt if I'd have done it in just that manner, but it worked out all right."

"You thought there was something fishy about it?" Ryan's faint laugh echoed the incredulity of his face.

R. K. smiled coldly. "My job is to protect the profit structure of this company—at its source. Diversion of materiel is an old story, Ryan. The losses can run into billions a year."

"You think I'd swindle my future father-in-law?"

"There isn't a P.A. alive who's never been tempted. And now that Mr. Bostic is no longer your future father-in-law, young man, you'd better buckle down and pay more attention to your work. You've got the ability."

"I wouldn't be here if I didn't," Ryan said crisply.

"Bear in mind," R. K. smiled, "it's eight years before I retire. If you work at it, you may be able to handle my job by then. If you last that long."

Ryan's eyebrows went up and he winced because of the bandage.

"My prediction," R. K. continued, "is that you'll either switch to another company within three years or be killed in one of your bar-room brawls."

"I tell you, R. K., I was just an innocent bystander. By the way, I've got to take a long lunch hour. I'm buying a car this afternoon. The new man from Hathaway Screw has an appointment with me at two. It won't hurt him any to cool his heels for half an hour or so, unless you want to see him."

R. K. stood up. "He's your ac-

count, Pete. Let him wait. I will not interfere. I don't understand about the car, though. What happened to your Jaguar? Is it wrecked?"

Ryan shook his head. "I'm just getting rid of it. I've got to revise my image. Playboys knock around in Jaguars and Ghias, but men of real responsibility, like you, R. K., are more—uh—conservative. I notice you drive a Buick."

"It gets me here and back again," R. K. observed cautiously.

"I was looking at some new Mercs this weekend," Ryan continued. "What do you think of Mercs?"

R. K. visibly relaxed. "As long as you don't commit yourself to too much money, it should be fine. A middle-priced Mercury ought to fill your bill perfectly."

"That's just what I had in mind, sir."

The older man smiled paternally as the two of them started towards the door. "Take all the time you want," he said. "I'll try to smooth things out with Mr. Bostic."

They went into the outer office, where Sylvia Robb was tidying up before lunch. She smiled at them. "No messages, Mr. Ryan," she reported. "I'll have your letters ready for signature by two o'clock, Mr. Young," she added.

"I may not be back till three," Ryan told her. "Stall the Hathaway salesman for me, will you, Robbie? Tell him I'm in conference with Mr. Bostic or something. And by the way, I have an ad in this afternoon's paper to sell my car. If there are any calls on it take their names and numbers and I'll call them back."

He left. Sylvia stared at the door for a moment, then looked questioningly at R. K. Young. "I thought he'd be in hot water this morning," she said. "With his engagement to the boss's daughter broken off and all."

R. K. smiled and reached for his hat. "You fail to realize, Miss Robb, that security in this firm depends upon ability rather than connections," he told her. "And that young man will go far. I'm glad to see that he's straightened out. With his talents, he doesn't need Phyllis Bostic."

ON HIS WAY out, Pete Ryan paused in the Executive Lounge long enough to pick up a cup of coffee. Around a corner, outside the Payroll section, stood an armed guard, a man in his fifties.

Ryan went to him. "Hi, Perkins," he said. "Thought you'd like a cup of coffee. Okay?"

The guard's face broke into a wide grin. "Why, thanks, Mr. Ryan. Hey! What happened to your head?"

Pete Ryan fingered the bandage and grimaced. "I got hit with a beer bottle, Sam."

Sam Perkins grinned. "I'd heard you and Miss Bostic had broken

up, but I didn't know she was the violent type."

Ryan laughed. "Boy, news sure travels fast around here. We broke it up Friday, but it wasn't Phyllis who clobbered me. I drove over to Edgemont afterwards for a few drinks, and there I was, minding my own business, when suddenly the joint caves in. Two gorillas, both of 'em stoned to the gills. I never did find out what they were fighting about, but it was one hell of a brawl. The first I knew of it—" Ryan launched into a blow-by-blow account, complete with dialogue, which graphically re-created the disaster.

In the middle of his narrative the Payroll door opened and Mr. Carson, the firm's treasurer, stepped into the corridor and lingered to listen. "He was moving pretty fast," Pete Ryan continued, "and I kept my eyes on the bottle, which is why I didn't see his other hand coming at me until he'd knocked the wind out of me with it."

Sam Perkins winced in sympathy. "And you never met him before, huh? Not anywhere that you can recall?"

Ryan shook his head. "Didn't know him from Adam. Anyway, I doubled up from that punch in the belly and he was swinging the bottle around like a baseball bat. The next thing I know I'm hearing sirens and they're taking me to the hospital. Fourteen stitches. I think they left part of the bottle in there, from the way it feels."

"I'd hate to be in that guy's shoes when he comes up for trial," the guard said.

"What trial? They both made for the hills before the cops got there. And the bartender swore he'd never seen 'em before in his life."

"Naturally," said Mr. Carson.

"They're probably his best customers and he's protecting his regular trade."

"Yeah," agreed Sam Perkins. "He knows you won't come in again, after getting half killed in his place."

"I bet you're right," Ryan said. "At any rate, that's one weekend I won't forget, you can depend on that."

"You tell a very good story, Mr. Ryan," the treasurer said approvingly. "Made me feel I'd been there myself. You should have been an actor."

Pete Ryan grimaced. "I did some acting in school," he admitted. "The teachers thought I was a

good leading man type. But I couldn't go that grease paint."

Carson lifted his eyebrows. "You might like to talk to my wife. Mrs. Carson is quite active in a little theatre group here."

"Thanks anyway, but I've had it with the stage. Besides, my duties in Purchasing are too demanding for anything like that, now that R. K.'s taking his doctor's advice and is delegating more authority."

"I'll tell her about you, anyway," Carson said. "In case you have a change of heart."

The two men started to move off down the hall when Sam Perkins spoke up: "Thanks for the coffee, Mr. Ryan!"

As Ryan and the company treasurer rounded the corner Sam sipped at his coffee, then pursed his lips thoughtfully. "It's a damn shame," he said to no one in particular. "That's the kind of guy deserves to marry the boss's daughter."

AT THE CITY'S largest Ford dealership Pete Ryan picked out the car he wanted and let the salesman talk him into it. He indicated that he had no intention of trading in the Jaguar and that he wanted the deal to be strictly credit. Within five minutes he was invited into a glass-walled cubicle by Mr. Phil Gresham, who introduced himself as Vice President in charge of sales and motioned Ryan to sit down.

"I understand you want this car with no money down," Gresham said, as if such a thing had never happened before.

Pete Ryan nodded. "That's right. On a thirty-six month contract."

"What sort of work do you do, Mr. Ryan?" Gresham inquired, having mentally inventoried Pete's clothes, shoes and wristwatch and found them acceptable. He slid a pad of credit applications from a recess under the desk.

"Assistant Purchasing Agent for Bostic Corporation," Ryan recited. "Two years on the job. My immediate superior is Ralph K. Young, Chief Purchasing Agent—although I'm really more responsible to C. W. Bostic, the president." He took a society page clipping from an inside pocket. "As you can see, I will shortly become his son-in-law."

Gresham glanced briefly at it. "Beautiful girl," he said. "Where'd you work before that?"

Pete Ryan reeled off the vital names and addresses. "You need my university and Army records, too?"

"This goes back far enough," Gresham assured him. "Any other source of income?"

"A few investments—fairly well balanced, I think, between growth and income. They produce in the neighborhood of fifteen hundred a year." Gresham added the broker's name to the application.

Ryan then named three open accounts, two revolving charge plans, his key club membership and a few other examples of good credit. "That take care of it? I'd like delivery about five thirty tomorrow afternoon. That'll give you plenty of time to check my credit. Now where do I sign?"

There were more papers to be filled out, but still Ryan managed to get back to the office by two thirty-five.

"A Mr. Arnold Moseby called in regard to the car," Sylvia informed him, handing him the memo. "Just a few minutes ago. The man from Hathaway said he'll come back tomorrow. And Mr. Bostic wants you in his office at your earliest convenience," she added, looking worried.

"You fret too much, Robbie," he told her airily. "You'll get wrinkles."

C. W. BOSTIC was a bull of a man who had started the plant as a three-man machine shop. Time had knocked some of the burrs from his personality and circumstances had mellowed his manners. But Pete Ryan knew that underneath this cobweb veneer Bostic was still as rough as they come.

"Do you deny that there's another woman?" Bostic roared.

"Believe me, Mr. Bostic, Phyllis leaped to the wrong conclusion," Ryan insisted.

Bostic glared at him. "My

daughter may leap to conclusions, but she doesn't have hallucinations. You were seen having cocktails with an extremely good-looking blonde. There were lipstick-stained cigarette stubs and other evidence in your apartment, she tells me. You can't wheedle your way out of this one, Ryan. If I were you I wouldn't even try."

"Yes, sir."

"Phyllis's pride is pretty carved up. It's humiliating to a woman like to her to find her fiancee playing around with someone else." He frowned. "It's inconvenienced me, too. I had some great plans for your future, young man."

"I know, sir."

"You've done some fine work here, according to R. K.," Bostic conceded in a grumble. "If you want a recommendation to another firm—"

"Well, sir, if you don't mind I'd prefer to stay on here."

Bostic's thick eyebrows lifted. "Indeed! Well, I don't believe it would be feasible. I know my daughter's faults as well as her vir-

tues. She can be extremely vindictive. I'll have to hold back any promotions for you for some time to come—if I want peace at home. I can't fire you because you played around with some broad, but I warn you, Phyllis won't be happy until you've left here."

Ryan allowed himself a rueful smile. "I'd love to make Phyl happy, sir, but not on her terms. Anyway, you didn't hire me because I loved your daughter. You liked my qualifications. I've been with Bostic for over two years and I think I'm better qualified now than I was then. Besides, I like it here."

Bostic glanced shrewdly at Ryan. "I wanted you to understand my position in this, Ryan, and to make clear to you that you'd advance much faster with another company. With your ability and my recommendation you'd have no trouble transferring. But if you prefer to stay—"

"I do, sir," Ryan replied. "I realize your position, but Bostic is where I belong." He hesitated. "Maybe someday I can convince Phyl again that I love her."

C. W. Bostic smiled reluctantly. "More power to you if you can. Now get back to work."

SLYVIA ROBB looked puzzled as Pete Ryan handed her the container of coffee. "To celebrate with," he explained. "Honey, Old Man Bostic thinks I'm the greatest thing that ever happened to this plant."

"He didn't sound that way when he called," she said. "I thought he was going to chew you out."

"He congratulated me! He said he's glad she's out of my hair, and he'll be damned if he'll let Phyl's hurt feelings stop me from getting to the top—and quickly. That's what he said, doll, word for word."

"What'd you do, hypnotize him?"

"Look, honey, the Old Man didn't get where he is today by letting his daughter push him around. He knows a good company man when he sees him."

Sylvia smiled wickedly. "Don't forget, darling," she cooed throatily, "so do I."

"You stick with me, Sylv, and the sky's the limit."

"You still get the promotion, then?"

"Well," he hedged, "not this week—"

"Then how are you going to cover up the kickbacks?"

"Don't ever use that word in this office again," he warned. "If you do—"

"It could be embarrassing to you, lover, couldn't it?" Her voice was bland.

Pete Ryan looked at her, speculatively. "I've got it all figured out and moving. And it won't go wrong because it doesn't depend on anyone—understand, anyone—but me."

"Why don't we discuss it at dinner tonight?" she suggested.

"Sorry, honey, I'm going to be busy."

"Tomorrow night, then?"

"Look, beautiful, I think we'd better see each other only at the office for a couple of weeks."

"Are you cutting me out?" Sylvia's gray eyes slitted.

"Don't be silly, doll. I'm protecting you. If you don't know anything you obviously can't be involved or suspected of complicity."

"Well, I don't like it."

"You're just going to have to trust me, honey." He kissed her expertly, holding her until she relaxed in his arms and her lips softened under his.

THE SETTING SUN glinted on the turbojet as it made its final turn toward the airport. Moments later the huge craft was earthbound, hurtling along the runway until it came to a stop near gate twenty-three. Its doors opened to connect with the aluminum stairways. Few of the departing passengers paused to look at the sunset. A luggage truck took the suitcases from the plane.

A balding man of indeterminate age emerged from the front of the terminal. He wore a business suit, a green shirt and a Texas string tie, and carried a large, fairly new suitcase and a brown briefcase. Glancing around, he spotted a bank of phones without dials, selected one and spoke briefly into it.

He listened for a moment, hung up and walked over to a nearby loading area. Soon a small bus incongruously topped with a thatched roof stopped at the curb and the man got in. On the side of the bus were the words *Polynesian Village Motel—Courtesy Car.* He got in.

Three miles up the freeway was the motel itself, its facade dominated, as might be expected, by much bamboo. The balding man registered as, "Arnold Moseby, Buffalo, N.Y.," and was shown to a room. Apparently satisfied with his accommodations he unpacked, then set out in search of the bar.

Within an hour he had endeared himself to the barkeep through the size of his tips, although other patrons found the crudeness of his manners, the coarseness of his language and his insistent eagerness to find out "where the action is" more than slightly crude and obnoxious.

Unsuccessful in his quest for "action," Moseby retired shortly before midnight Monday night. He informed the night clerk that he wanted a five-thirty call as he had to catch an early jet to Los Angeles. He would not be checking out, as he'd be back by evening. The clerk courteously asked if his airline reservation had been made and Moseby assured him that it had.

TUESDAY MORNING Pete Ryan arrived at work on time. Sylvia was astonished. R. K. Young was delighted. C. W. Bostic, when informed of this turn of events, grunted.

At five o'clock that afternoon Ryan drove his white Jaguar through Bostic's gates for the last time. He drove to a multi-decked parking lot in the heart of town, handed over the keys to an attendant and placed the claim check in a stamped envelope. To this he added the certificate of ownership after signing "Peter B. Ryan" on the release line. The envelope was addressed. "Mr. Arnold Moseby, Polynesian Village Motel No. 34." He sealed it and posted it in a nearby letterbox, then hailed a taxi.

He had checked earlier by telephone with the Mercury dealer. His credit was excellent and his car was waiting. It took all of ten minutes to accept delivery and drive off in it.

If Sylvia Robb had been watching him that Tuesday night, she would have been alarmed by his next actions, for he stopped at his apartment only long enough to pick up a small brown briefcase. Then he drove to the airport.

ARNOLD MOSEBY, too, stopped only briefly in his room—just long enough, in fact, to change his coat and inspect the barren dome of his head in the mirror. Frowning, he rummaged in a drawer, found a tube, squeezed out a minute amount of its contents and rubbed the stuff on his glistening pate. Satisfied with the effect he replaced the tube, straightened his tie and headed for the bamboo bar.

He stood in the entryway and let his eyes adjust to the gloom. The bar itself was nearly empty; three salesman sat at one end, at the other was a redhead in a tight gold dress. He headed for her like a salmon going upstream.

"Buy you a drink?" he offered.

She half-turned to look at him. "You're a stranger," she said, "and I don't accept drinks from strangers."

"Arnold Moseby," he told her, smiling affably. "But you can call me Arnie any old time."

She smiled, showing a dimple in one cheek. "Janet. Janet Swing."

"I bet you do," Moseby guffawed, slapping her back. "What're you drinking?"

"French Seventy-fives."

Moseby looked bewildered.

The redhead smiled indulgently. "Champagne and brandy," she explained.

Moseby beckoned to the bartender. "A French whatchamacallit for the lady—and I'll take gin." He looked her over out of the corners of his eyes.

The gold dress hugged her figure without seeming blatant about it. The hair was long and deep red, the eyes sherry-brown. In front of

her was an ashtray and a book of matches. Her hands tore a match out, lit it, slit the other end with a thumbnail and peeled it apart. She blew out both halves and dropped them into the ashtray. She sipped her drink.

"You here on business?" she asked.

"Only when the sun's up," he laughed. "What I want to do is find a business to buy into."

Janet licked her lips lightly, daintily. "A money man," she said softly.

"You hit the nail right on the head, Janet honey." He laughed, slapping her back again, playfully. "Five days here and then back to God's country."

"Where's that?"

"Upstate New York, baby, upstate New York. I bet you're from back East, too."

"Kansas City," she said. "For starters."

"I spent three days there once, y'know. Been on the coast long?"

"Too long," Her mouth drooped sullenly.

Moseby chugalugged his gin and ordered a double. "You here alone?" he asked.

"Not very often."

He nodded. The girl had what he was looking for. She dressed the way he wanted her to dress and, best of all, she looked available. "What do you say we get out of here?" he ventured, prodding her ribs with his elbow. "We could take a cab into the city and you could show me the sights. Would that appeal to you?"

Her fingers were shredding another match. She blew it out. "Don't you think we ought to know each other better first?" Her voice was whispery.

Arnold thought it over carefully for a few minutes while finishing his double. Then he nodded agreement. "My room or yours?"

The girl shrugged. "Does it make any difference?"

He'd picked her up to make his role of Moseby more convincing. But now it was taking on an aspect he hadn't foreseen. He had never been one who could just say "hello" and "goodbye" to a woman distinctly on the special side.

He slapped a ten dollar bill on the mahogany. "Bartender!" he yodeled. "Give us two more of the same—to go. Only make mine a triple!"

WEDNESDAY AT THE Bostic Corporation was distinguished by two events. The first was Pete Ryan's arrival on time for the second day in a row, which pleased R. K. Young and puzzled Sylvia Robb. They both noticed the new and smaller bandage over his right eye, and commented upon it.

"It's pretty ugly-looking underneath," Ryan told them, "but it's healing. It's starting to itch already."

The second event was much more casual, consisting merely of the habitual cup of coffee brought by Pete Ryan to Sam Perkins, the guard posted outside the Payroll section. They conversed for about five minutes. When Sam asked about his head, Ruan replied, "I've got to see the medic tomorrow and have the stitches taken out."

"Hey, that can hurt," Sam observed.

"So I've heard."

The rest of the day was as routine as any other. If there was a difference it may have been that Pete Ryan worked harder than usual, but no one would have sworn to it. He left promptly at five, reluctantly resisting Sylvia's hints that they should see each other later that evening.

When he arrived at his apartment he was delighted to find in the mail his broker's check for the full amount of his investments—slightly over four thousand dollars.

He spent an hour sorting through his belongings, keeping only those items which couldn't be traced to Peter B. Ryan. There was much that had to stay behind, but with the Bostic payroll—in cash—he could replace it all at least ten times over.

As he was leaving the phone rang. He listened to it for a minute, then smiled and went out. There was no time for phone calls.

IT WAS ALMOST seven o'clock when Arnold Moseby paid the cab driver and walked into the bamboo motel lobby. At the desk he inquired for mail and was handed an enveloped. He put it, unopened, in his inside coat pocket, then picked up the house phone and asked for Miss Swing in room twenty-seven.

"Janet, this is Arnie," he announced genially. "Want to come downtown with me and help me collect my new buggy? Then we can take a ride and stop at some swingin' joint for dinner."

"Is that the white Jaguar you were telling me about last night?"

"That's right, honey-babe. You're pretty sharp remembering that. I just picked up the title this minute. How soon can you get dressed?"

"Oh, it would take me an hour anyway. I'm simply a mess."

"Well," gurgled Moseby, "I'll be right up."

"You do and you'll be out on your ear," she told him icily. "Where's the Jag?"

"It's in a parking lot downtown." Moseby pouted. The clerk looked at him and stifled a grin.

"Tell you what, Arnie," Janet suggested. "You go and get it and then come back here and pick me up? By that time I'll be ready. Maybe we could drive out to the ocean and have dinner there somewhere."

"What's the matter?" Moseby's voice became a nasty growl. "You afraid to sit in the back seat of a taxi with me?"

"That's not true, Arnie honey, and you know it. It's just that the City makes me nervous. Pick me up in an hour or so, will you?"

"Okay."

With the jovial grin back on his face, Moseby hung up and walked outside. The cab that had brought him was still there. He got in and ordered the driver to take him downtown. He tore open the enveloped and looked at the ticket in order to give the cabbie the address of the lot where Ryan had left the Jaguar.

THURSDAY NOON Mr. Carson emerged from Payroll a moment after Pete Ryan delivered Sam Perkins' coffee. "I mentioned you to my wife, Ryan," he said. "She very much wants you to try out for her group's next production. Will you be free Saturday afternoon?"

Ryan squirmed. "I'll let you

know, Mr. Carson. Actually, I rather wish you hadn't mentioned that I used to act. It was a long time ago and I never really was too good at it."

"You should see some of the people in her group," Carson laughed.

"I'd like to give this gash on my head a little more time to heal. I'm afraid I'll have a pretty obvious scar for a while. Once I can hide it with make-up, I'll try out. But not this time."

"Mrs. Carson will be disappointed," the treasurer said.

"Are the stitches out yet?" Sam Perkins asked.

"Three o'clock this afternoon," Ryan told him.

At two-thirty he left, telling Sylvia not to expect him back till the following morning.

"Will you be home tonight, Pete?" she asked almost too casually.

"I doubt it, kitten, I have a lot of things to do."

"You weren't in last night, either," she said, a slight edge to her voice. "I tried to call you."

"Was it important?"

"I just wanted to see you."

"Now look, Syl. I told you the other day—"

"I know, I know! If I don't know anything I can't be involved or suspected."

"That's my girl." Pete Ryan took her face in his hands and looked at her tenderly. "In a week or so we'll be together again without having to sneak around."

He gave her a reassuring kiss, made his exit and went out to the parking lot. Tossing his briefcase on the seat, he nosed the Merc out of his slot, waved at the gate guard and drove to a bank, where he cashed his broker's check. Four thousand of it went into the briefcase; the balance he stuffed in his wallet.

He didn't bother going to his apartment or to his doctor. Instead, he hurried to the airport.

JANET SWING was waiting when Arnold arrived at the motel. She seemed distracted and finally, during dinner, Moseby noticed it.

"What's the matter, honeybabe?" he inquired in a voice which carried clearly to diners at the other end of the room.

"I've got to talk to you," she said quietly.

"So talk, baby, talk!" he invited in a gentle roar.

Janet winced. "Not here. Not in public."

"We'll go to my room, then," he suggested.

"All right."

He paid the check and escorted her to number thirty-four. Locking the door behind them, he joined her on the couch and patted her knee. "Tell Arnie all about it," he said.

"I—I don't know how to begin."

"Are you in trouble?"

"No—well, yes. In a way."

"Don't you know, honey-babe?"

"Arnold," she asked, "are you married?"

Moseby choked and scrambled off the couch.

"Please tell me, Arnie. I've got to know. It's very important."

"Well, kind of. I mean I used to be, but I'm not any more. At least, I don't think I am."

"Do you have a girlfriend back home?"

Moseby gurgled in delight. "Well—I don't like to brag about it—but what does that have to do with—?"

"Arnie," the redhead said urgently, "I want you to take me with you when you go back to Buffalo. Please?" Janet got up, snuggled against him and put her arms around his neck. Moseby shied away from her.

"I won't be any trouble," she begged. "I promise."

Moseby pulled her arms down and held her firmly away. "Well, now, honey-babe, it sounds kind of all right but there's something

called the Mann Act. I don't quite know how it works, but I do know what you're asking isn't legal."

"Every time we come to a state line I'll walk across," she vowed.

"I just don't think it's right."

"Why not?"

"You might start to thinking about gettin' married. I'm not about to get married again."

"Listen to me, Arnold. Once we get to Buffalo I'll say goodbye and you'll never see me again. Or you can drop me off in Kansas City if you want to. I've got to get off the West Coast." She was crying now.

Aw, honey-babe, don't do that. Why can't you take a plane?"

"Money," she said.

"Well!"—Moseby pounded her shoulder—"I'll buy you a ticket."

"No!" she protested quickly. "No!"

"No?"

"No!" She was silent for a moment, drying her eyes. "Listen, Arnie, when I came here I got in with the wrong crowd, you know?"

"I'm afraid I don't," he said, frowning.

"Anyway, I found out some things that could put them in prison, and they know I know these things. They don't know where I am, but they're trying to find me."

"Oh-h-h! Hmm! Are the police looking for you, too?"

"The police don't even know I exist. But if I tried to go to them I'd never make it. Now do you see why I can't take a plane or a train or a bus out of here?"

Moseby nodded slowly. "You're kind of in trouble. You ever try to make 'em pay you to keep quiet? Bet they would."

"I don't want their money. I just want out. Can't you understand that? I just want to get out alive. And you're the only one who can help me."

Arnie looked at her but didn't say anything.

"The only thing they can't check on," she explained, "is every car that drives out of California. Please take me with you!" She was sobbing again.

Arnold Moseby bit his lip. "I've got to think about it," he said. "I'm starting back Saturday—that's plenty of time to think in."

"That late?" she wailed.

"Honey-babe, I got business here. I don't know if I'll take you, but I'll think about it and if I do it'll be on Saturday."

"I'm so scared, Arnie. I'm so scared."

"I think the best thing to do is just go to your room and stay there and maybe Saturday—"

"You sure you can't leave sooner?"

"Look, Janet, I like you. You're a lot of fun and you make me laugh. It would be kind of nice to have you around. But there's several thousand bucks in this deal I'm working on and I can't let a woman louse up my business

plans. It happened to me once and it won't happen again."

He scowled at his shoes. "Besides, I'll sorta be getting into danger myself, won't I?"

"I guess I can wait until Saturday, then. But I'm awfully scared."

"You said they don't know where you are," Moseby reminded her.

"I'm not sure. Lend me a hanky, huh? There was a man in the coffee-shop tonight. He looked at me like he recognized me."

"Did you know him? Seen him before?"

"No."

"Well, you're imagining things, girl!" The bellow was back in full force. "Honey, you're the kind of gal a man's got to look at twice." He put his arm around her. "Tell you what. If it'll make you feel better you can stay here tonight."

She sighed tiredly. "You're a nice guy, Arnie. I hate imposing on you, but thanks."

Moseby grinned and took off his jacket. "I'll be leaving early," he warned. "I've got to fly to L.A. again, so you just spend the whole day here if you want to. I'll try to be quiet getting up."

The phone rang at four-thirty, but it didn't disturb the sleeping redhead. Moseby thanked the night clerk for the call and dressed quietly. Briefcase in hand, he stood for a short while looking thoughtfully at the sleeping girl. Then, nodding happily, he turned out the lights and tiptoed from the room.

Arnold Moseby parked the Jaguar at the airport and entered the terminal. He breakfasted leisurely in the coffee-shop overlooking the runway and parking area, then proceeded to a bank of coin-lockers. He took a key from his pocket and opened one of them. Inside was a suitcase which he removed and carried downstairs to the men's washroom.

FRIDAY MORNING, promptly at ten, the armoured truck arrived with the Bostic payroll. Pete Ryan watched from his office window as it pulled up alongside the building and stopped. The guards went through their ritual, unloading and carrying the two sacks of money into the plant.

Ryan glanced at his watch and smiled. The bandage was gone from his forehead, revealing a livid scar.

Inside the Payroll section Mr. Carson accepted the cargo and signed the receipt. The guards departed. Carson and his assistant dumpd the money on the sorting table. By eleven o'clock the currency was neatly stacked, the coin rolls had all been broken open and their contents placed in five metal bins. The system had not varied in forty years.

The long boxes of pay envelopes, each with its yellow account-

ing slip protruding from the open end, were positioned. At eleven thirty the assistant departed. Three minutes later a cafeteria employee brought Mr. Carson his lunch. Sam Perkins unlocked the heavy door for her, locked it behind her, and repeated the process a few moments later.

Pete Ryan sat very still behind his desk, his eyes on the second hand of his watch. At exactly fifteen minutes before twelve he opened a drawer, took out a paper cup and a small bottle. Quickly he unscrewed the cap and poured a small amount of the liquid contents into the cup. He capped the bottle, dropped it in a pocket and rose. With his briefcase in one hand and the cup in the other he went into the outer office.

"Leaving so soon?" Sylvia inquired.

"Maltman invited me to lunch downtown today," he told her. "I think he's dropped his price to where we can do business. I don't know just when I'll be back."

"Aye, aye, captain," she said.

He kissed her lingeringly.

"Well, now," Sylvia said. "That's promising."

"That's for luck," he told her, and left.

The blonde gazed thoughtfully at the door for a while, then resumed typing.

In the Executive Lounge Pete Ryan added coffee and sugar to the cup, then carried it to Sam Perkins. The guard took the cup and stared at Ryan's scar. "That sure was a nasty cut you got," he said.

Pete Ryan grinned cheerfully. "It'll fade. Doc said the best thing now is to let the air get to it so it'll heal normally. In a month or so—"

Perkins sipped the coffee and made a face.

"Lousy, isn't it?" Ryan sympathized. "I complained about it, too. Seems they're trying out a new brand. Let's hope that after the girls get the hang of it they'll make good coffee with it."

Perkins downed a goodly amount. "You know," he confided, "my wife never did learn to make a decent pot of coffee. After drinking hers I guess I can get used to this."

"That's the spirit," Ryan laughed.

The guard took another healthy swig and blinked. "I guess I sure needed this coffee," he said thickly. "Awf'lly sleepy."

"Well, drink up, then," Ryan urged. "You can't afford to go to sleep today, man, with all that green stuff floating around."

"Thass ri', M'sser Ryan," Perkins agreed, swallowing more of the steaming liquid. He stared glassily at Ryan, yawned and offered no resistance when Ryan eased the cup from his grasp and lowered him gently to the floor. Sam Perkins began to snore.

With a quick glance to make sure the corridor was still empty, Ryan removed the keys from Sam's belt and unlocked the heavy door to the money room. Grabbing Perkins by the heels he dragged the man inside and closed the door. He checked his watch. The entire operation had taken about three minutes.

Mr. Carter called from the inside room. "What's the matter, Jack? Did you forget something?"

Perkins' gun was in Ryan's hand now and he moved to the connecting door, flinging it open. "Just do as I say, Mr. Carter, and you won't get hurt," he said pleasantly. Enjoying the look on the man's face, he tossed the briefcase at Carter's feet.

"You—you can't get away with this," the treasurer sputtered.

"I sure intend to try. Now fill the briefcase—neatly—and be quick about it."

Carter looked ill. He eyed the gun Pete Ryan was brandishing, swallowed, and began to comply. As he placed stacks of currency in the case his composure returned.

"Where'll you go?" he inquired conversationally. "There'll be a description out immediately. That scar on your forehead will give you away in a minute."

"Let me worry about that," Ryan snapped. "Pack the bag."

"How did you get past Sam?"

"A little chloral hydrate in his coffee. He'll get over it."

"Very clever, Ryan. I hope you'll take care of me in the same manner? I'd prefer it to being shot."

"Excellent idea, Carter." Pete Ryan moved around to the treasurer's lunch. Keeping the man covered, he got the bottle from his pocket, worried the cap off with one hand and dribbled several drops into Carter's iced tea.

Carter shrugged, drank the doctored tea and oblingly passed out. Ryan returned the gun to Perkins' holster and let himself out of the Payroll office, locking the door.

Then, with bulging briefcase, he strolled out of the building, got in his new car and drove off.

IT TOOK Pete Ryan twenty-six minutes to get to the airport. Once there, he parked the Mercury, took a suitcase from its trunk and carried that, along with the briefcase, into the terminal.

However, instead of going to a ticket counter, he turned left and entered the men's lounge, going directly to a private, coin-access dressingroom.

Here he changed suits, depositing his Ivy Leagues in the suitcase and donning the provincial togs of a tourist. Then he leaned close to the mirror and with the fingertips of both hands stretched the skin of his forehead on either side of the livid scar, worrying the flesh underneath until it slid free of one edge of the bruised area. Care-

full, he lifted the edge and peeled off the scar.

Then he grasped his thick black hair and lifted it from his shiny scalp. The toupee and scar also went into the suitcase. Adhesive solvent and a vigorous rubbing with a rough towel removed all traces of both.

Satisfied with his appearance, Arnold Moseby locked the suitcase, picked it and the briefcase up and made his exit.

In the parking lot he went directly to his Jaguar and drove off, whistling, in the direction of the Polynesian Village Motel.

There was no longer anyone named Pete Ryan. And there was no link between him and crude, loud Arnie Moseby—for Moseby had begun to exist a week ago, when Ryan was still preparing for the robbery.

With almost thirty-six thousand dollars in his briefcase, another four thousand waiting for him at the motel, plus a beautiful redhead eager to accompany him back East, it had been a profitable week.

He pulled into the motel and parked. Leaving the suitcase in the trunk, he took the brown briefcase with him into the lobby.

"Afternoon, Mr. Moseby," the clerk said. "No mail."

As if in response to a signal, two men detached themselves languidly from the lobby chairs and approached. "Mr. Moseby?" one of them asked. "Arnold Moseby?"

"That's right," he boomed jovially.

"Police, Mr. Moseby. We'd like to talk to you downtown."

Pete Ryan forced himself to be calm. He was acutely aware of the briefcase under his arm. "What's the trouble, fellows?"

"Murder, Mr. Moseby. The body of Janet Swing was found in your room this morning. Did you kill her?"

"Certainly not!" Pete Ryan sputtered. "That's—that's ridiculous!"

The taller of the two detectives smiled. "Then you have nothing to worry about. It's just a formality, but we have to check out every angle. They'll take your statement at headquarters and let you go."

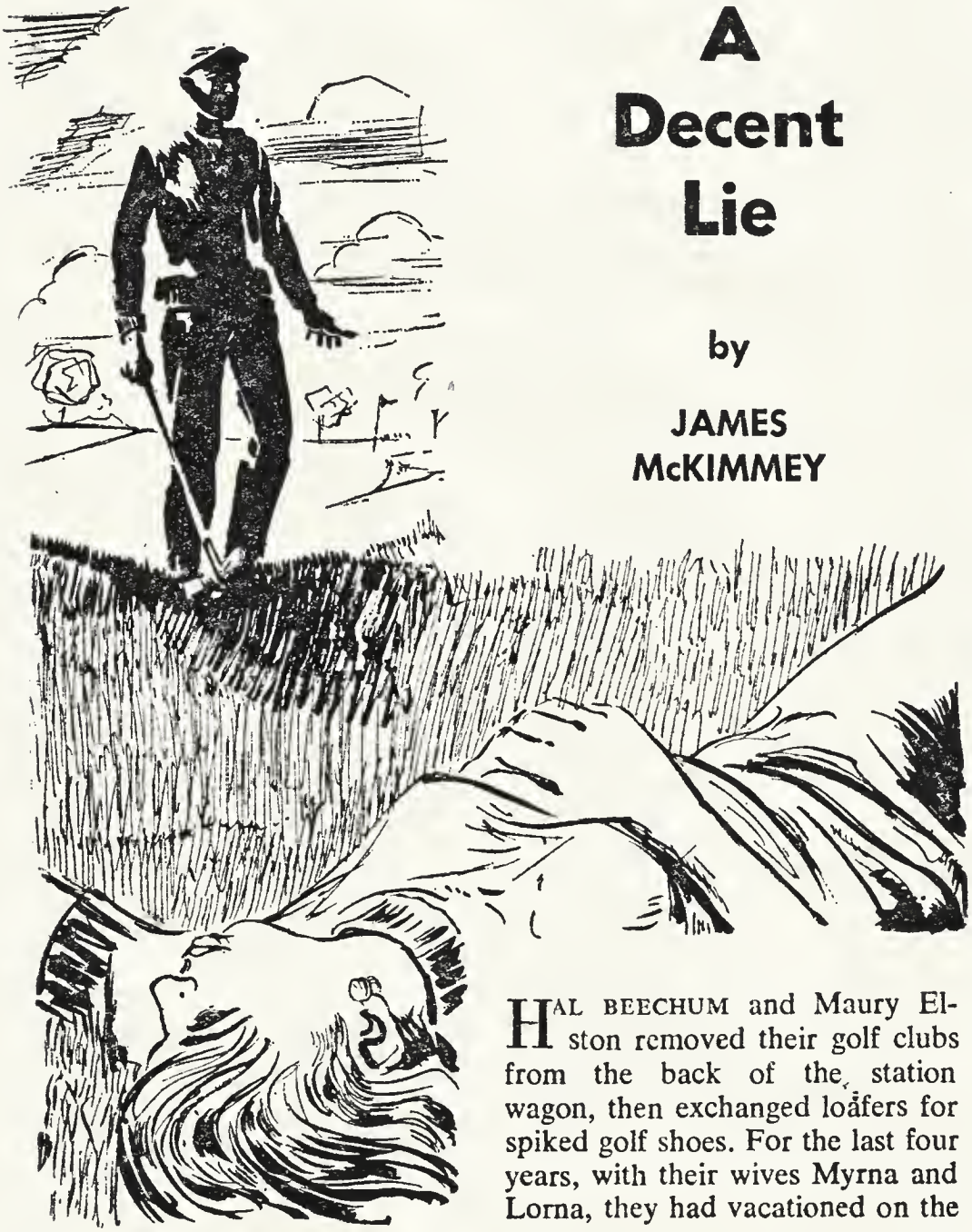
"Statement?" Pete Ryan said cautiously. "About what?"

"Your relationship with the dead girl," the first cop said. "She was found in your room, buddy. So was four thousand dollars in cash. It was locked in a drawer, so it looks like you didn't trust her alone with it. You probably have a good reason for carrying that much cash."

The second cop picked it up. "We'll also need your home address and some personal references—plus, of course, a pretty detailed account of your whereabouts for the past twenty-four hours. What's the matter, Mr. Moseby? You look ill."

It was then that Pete Ryan started to cry.

When breaking 80 keeps a golfer awake nights . . . a little thing like murder can add to his woes.



A Decent Lie

by

JAMES McKIMMEY

HAL BEECHUM and Maury Elston removed their golf clubs from the back of the station wagon, then exchanged loafers for spiked golf shoes. For the last four years, with their wives Myrna and Lorna, they had vacationed on the

south shore of Lake Tahoe after the summer rush had subsided. Myrna and Lorna had wanted to learn golf at the beginning. But Hal and Maury had discovered that both women had an insatiable desire to play slot machines in the casinos across the Nevada line, leaving them free for the golf course every day.

It sometimes was expensive, but it was worth it, Hal Beechum had thought. His wife Myrna had shown disquieting signs of honest ability at learning the game, as had his oldest son Ritch, who fortunately had lost interest. But the slot machines had helped take care of Myrna. And now Ritch and his younger brother, along with Maury's boys, were spending summers in Arizona with Hal's uncle, allowing them to vacation at Tahoe from the San Francisco Peninsula where both families lived.

Maury Elston snapped open his cart and wriggled his heavy shoulders.

"I'll tell you, Hal," he said. "It's got to beat yesterday."

"Anything has got to beat yesterday," Beechum said. He opened his own cart and surveyed the narrow well-tended fairways stretching through the high pine and boulders. The course appeared to be nearly empty of players. When they played weekends on the Peninsula, they had to make appointments and wait endlessly at tees. But here, with the season waning, they had the freedom of a number of uncrowded courses.

They went to the clubhouse to register and pay a lone attendant who kept his eyes on a small television set, then walked to the first tee.

"Well," Maury said, pulling out his driver, "this little baby may look easy. But just try to tell that to someone who's played it before."

"Let her out, Maury," Hal said generously. He looked critically down the fairway, and then back at Maury placing his tee and ball. Maury straightened, making quick practice swings. He was a thicker man than Hal, dressed in golf cap, yellow alpaca sweater, Arnold Palmer slacks and pebble-grained golf shoes. Hal's attire was identical if you wrote off a turtle-necked white sweater.

Maury shifted his shoulders, waggling the club at the ball again. Then his knees bent radically. His head froze into position, and his hips began a wild series of jerkings. He audibly sucked in air. Finally the club flew backward, then down. Maury's feet came off the ground as the ball was struck. When the club reappeared momentarily it was twisted about his neck as though choking him.

But the ball sailed neatly down the fairway and rolled to a stop two hundred and thirty yards away. Maury disengaged himself without injury. "I think you can put me down for that."

He stepped jauntily aside, and Hal teed up his own ball. The moment he started his swing he was certain that he might have the rhythm today. He felt a gratifying impact, and the ball went straight, not too high, down the fairway. It landed beyond where Maury's ball had stopped and rolled to a point two hundred and seventy yards away. He had never hit a better shot.

Maury's eyes tightened at the corners as they started off. "A lot of it up here is the light air," he said. "You can get off a shot in this altitude that you couldn't get anywhere else on God's earth!"

He was speaking loudly, and Hal felt quite good. That he and Maury were competitive there could be no doubt. They lived two houses apart, and spent almost all of their free time together, including the time they spent commuting back and forth to San Francisco where both were chief underwriters for separate insurance companies. There was little he did that Maury would not sooner or later emulate and attempt to outdo.

Both continually strove to reach that magic goal: breaking 80. Hal just hoped that he would be the first. Maury had been the first to break ninety, and you could hear about that over a game of bridge or at the intermission of a drive-in movie or at almost any other occasion you might care to name.

He looped a clean seven-iron shot to the green where the ball stopped less than two feet from the cup. He had the nerve-tingling feeling that this might be the day.

Hal Beechum was almost positive of it as they approached the seventeenth tee. He'd birdied one hole and bogied ten, getting par for the others. Par for the course was 70 and he was now at 71. The last two holes were 400 yarders, each a par 4. If he could get the par for both, he would be in at 79 and over the falls in a barrel. Maury, on the other hand, had played a good deal in the trees today; he was presently twenty over par and in a wicked state of mind.

Hal surveyed the fairway tensely. The tee area was at the start of a V created by the close lining of trees on either side. The ground rose sharply toward the hole, which was tucked to the left behind a single pine. On the right was a column of trees forming a small woods, with the last fairway coming down the opposite way on the other side. Sixty yards ahead in the woods between fairways was an abandoned caretaker's shed.

He had to be careful about two things: he couldn't scoop the ball, which he tended to do when he was facing a rising fairway; and he couldn't play the ball too far away and put it into those trees by the shed. If he got in there he was bound to lose a stroke.

"You're taking more time than

Jack Nicklaus," Maury said impatiently.

And he should not take too much time, Hal told himself, because when he did and thought about it too much everything went wrong. But he did exactly that. And the moment he hit the ball, he knew that he had not only scooped it, but had struck it on the outside of the club face. The ball fled high in the air and came down through the branches by the shed. He could hear it rattling against wood.

With relish Maury lit a cigar and boomed a long drive up the slope. "You might not have to take two strokes on that, Hal. You might find it, at that."

Hal walked into the woods angrily, yanking his cart behind. He swung at dried pine needles with an iron, his forehead beaded with sweat. Then, as he moved toward the shed with its door hanging open on a single rusting hinge, he saw a pair of women's golf shoes. There were ankles above, in white sport socks. Then browned calves.

He stared at a plump woman dressed in skirt, sweater and left-handed golf glove lying flat on her back with her eyes opening upward.

"Find it, Hal?" Maury Elston shouted.

Hal whirled in startlement. As though in a dream he saw his ball. He'd expected no decent lie, but it was perfectly perched on a crushed man's golf cap between the shed and a tree.

"I say," Maury yelled, "did you find it?"

Hal walked dazedly to his ball and discovered that he had a narrow, but clean, shot toward the green two hundred and twenty yards away. With a good four wood, he thought—

"Hal?"

He drew the club from his bag, blinking rapidly. *If he stopped to report that,* he thought, *it would be the end of the game.*

The swing started before he realized the motion. He felt a solid impact, then looked up as the ball bulleted in perfect flight. It struck ahead of the green and rolled on just beyond the pin. There was not a word from Maury on the fairway. *Finish this first,* he thought desperately.

He moved beyond the shack and saw, through the trees, a golfer coming down the last fairway. He turned to see Maury swinging furiously at his ball. Maury moved on to take a third stroke, which finally got him on the green.

Hal walked quickly to the green and one-putted for a birdie. Maury four-putted for a triple bogie, whispering to himself.

When they reached the final tee, Hal noticed that the player ahead must have already putted out. He looked at the shack in the trees, now to their right.

"Well?" Maury said impatiently.

Hal's heart was beating rapidly. He was five strokes away now. He swung wildly at the ball. Again it flew high into the air, back into the trees. Maury smiled satisfiedly and drove cleanly down the center of the fairway. The hole was out of sight from the tee, dogleging beyond the trees below. But there was no doubt in his mind that Maury would have a clear shot at the flag from where he was standing.

Hal marched into the trees, his face flushed. He had four strokes left. Maury waited cheerfully, watching him discover his ball lying against the base of a tree trunk.

"That'll be a sweetie," Maury called. "Of course, you can take the stroke. But I don't think Arnie, Jack, Tony, any of those boys would—even in a friendly game like this. Play it any way you like, Hal."

Hal studied the ball grimly. If he could wedge it out of there, getting it back on the fairway and far enough to the left, he would have a shot at the green. He pulled out his wedge and swung. The club topped the ball; it rolled a foot and stopped. He swung again. The ball spun sideways, into a tree, ricocheted into another, and rolled back to where he'd hit it. He swung a third time, and the ball skittered out to the fairway to stop just outside the tree line.

Maury scratched himself with delight. "I tell you, Hal, temper will do it."

"I wonder if a lot of talk is necessary every minute of the game!" Hal shouted.

"Have to put her right in the hole to break eighty now, wouldn't you? But that's a nice score anyway. You gave her the old try, Hal."

Hal grabbed a three wood from his bag and swung with all of his might. The ball careened from left to right and disappeared beyond the trees.

"Muscle like that will slice it out of this world every time," Hal stated philosophically.

Hal strode down the fairway in a dark rage. Maury put his second shot neatly on the green. At the end of the trees, Hal looked at the area to the right of the green where marsh grass formed a hopeless tangle.

"I'd say she's probably about in the middle of that," Maury said.

Hal tramped into the stiff grass. He'd been so close, too.

Maury walked onto the green happily. "I'll hold the pin for you, Hal, in case you find it and chip her right in." Then a look of disbelief changed his expression.

Hal felt wild surge of hope. "You don't see something in that cup, do you, Maury?"

Maury lifted a ball and stared at it in astonishment. "Aren't you playing a Binley four?"

"No," Hal said, "I'm playing a Dagway two."

Maury's shoulders sagged.

"What is it?" Hal said.

"A Dagway two," Maury whispered.

THEY WERE ALMOST back to the car when Hal finally remembered. Heart pumping, he said, "I think I dropped my keys up by that shed, Maury. Count the score again. I'll take a look."

Maury stared at the card, in grief.

When Hal reached the shed, he realized that he could explain it, after all. He simply had not noticed her until now. He would report it to the attendant in the clubhouse, if it were still open—it was getting late. Otherwise he would telephone the sheriff. An inconvenience, but every citizen had his duty.

He looked in the shed. The woman was gone.

He stepped in and bent down, squinting. Something wet was on the floorboards. It might be grease, he thought. But on the other hand—

He went out and made the display of kneeling to retrieve his keys. Then he returned to the parking lot. The clubhouse was indeed closed, and there were only two cars left in the parking area: his station wagon and a blue sedan. Why was it, he thought angrily, that every time you did something honestly great, there was always something to take the glory out of it?

As he passed the blue sedan, he purposely dropped his keys. Bending to retrieve them, he looked at the registration. The car belonged to Robert A. Woodfellow. He walked to his own car and got behind the wheel. Why, he thought, couldn't he simply revel in the moment of victory? Instead of having to make a fool of himself reporting a story of finding a woman stretched out in that shed who was no longer there, spoiling the whole victory by getting into all of that involvement? Perhaps, he rationalized, the whole thing had been an illusion, brought about by the pressure of the game.

Maury was still going over the score card. He said suddenly, "Wait a minute. Wait just a minute. Didn't you get into a bunker

on the fourteenth and take two getting out of it?"

"That was three days ago."

"I thought it was today. I'm almost certain it was today."

"No," Hal said, his voice rising, "it was three days ago!"

IN THE CABIN, Maury's wife Lorna said, "Honest to Pete! I was going great guns. I *knew* that machine was going to hit!"

"I don't see how you could have done it," Maury said grimly.

"You get going," Hal's wife Myrna said. "Boom! It happens."

"I said to myself," Lorna went on, "I'll play that machine on the end. Then I said, no, I'll play the fourth one from the end. It just started *spitting* back payoffs. Then, *whang*—jackpot! The light went on and the bell went off, and—"

"How could you possibly have played it off before they paid you? The machine pays you one dollar. They pay you six dollars and fifty cents! But, oh, no! You wipe it off!"

"Well, it was *my* machine!"

"I'm going to bed." Maury left the room. Lorna followed, sniffling.

"I don't see why he had to get so mad," Myrna said. "What if she hadn't gotten it in the first place?"

"I think it might possibly be because of something that hasn't been brought up yet this evening."

"What's that?"

"I broke eighty today."

Myrna looked at him in surprise. "Well, why in the world would you have done a thing like that on the day Lorna wipes off a jackpot?"

Beechum spent a sleepless night, his mind alternating between images of that woman lying in the shed and recreating his best shots, especially that three wood which he'd put right in the cup. By morning he'd convinced himself that he'd purposely sliced the ball to get it in like that. He'd practically convinced himself that nothing had really been wrong with the woman.

Women golfers were eccentric, he'd noticed; she probably had simply been taking a rest. He'd imagined something else out of the pressure of the moment. After they'd gone up to the green, she had probably stood up and walked off. Still, where had her clubs been? And he remembered something else now: when he'd gone back and pretended to look for his keys, the man's golf cap had disapeared.

When Myrna got up, he crawled out of bed and put on a robe and followed her into the kitchen. Maury and Lorna were already there. It was Lorna's morning to cook breakfast, and he could smell bacon burning. She stood rigidly at the stove with red-rimmed eyes. Maury sat at the table, grimly. They'd obviously

been quarreling, and Maury would not say good morning.

The breakfast was a silent, uncomfortable affair. After it was over, Myrna whispered reproachfully, "I don't see why you couldn't have done that on some old weekend at home instead of on vacation when we're supposed to be having fun!"

Hal left the cabin by himself late that morning and drove to the lake where he got out and walked along the sand beside the water. It was the last time, he decided, that they were going to vacation with Maury and Lorna. He was tired of having Maury constantly dull every achievement. He tried to force away the memory of that woman. If Maury had found her, he would have had an excuse to stop the game right then, which he certainly would have done. But, no, he'd been the one!

He returned to the car knowing finally that he would have to report it. He couldn't live with it otherwise. As he drove away from the lake, he heard from the radio:

". . . identified as Mrs. Robert A. Woodfellow, found late last night near the Wodfellows Nevada motel. Mr. Woodward, according to the sheriff's sub-station, stated that Mrs. Woodward had won a considerable amount of money in one of the casinos that morning, and that robbery was obviously the motive for the attack. Deciding to try her luck alone again that evening, she apparently was walking toward their car when the attacker struck. Her purse had been emptied . . ."

He switched off the radio, remembering the name he'd read on the registration of the blue sedan. He drove back toward the cabin. Sometimes, he thought excitedly, you had to play it the way the ball lay. You couldn't always rely on instinct either; you had to use the old bean.

Maury had been sunning himself glumly in front of the cabin; he crawled into the station wagon reluctantly. "Tell you the truth, Hal. As far as golf is concerned, I may give it up. When you stop to think of it, how foolish can a game get? I mean, you've got this stupid little ball . . ." Maury complained steadily, then finally said, "Well, what are we doing here?"

THE SHERIFF'S detective was a muscular man with a crew-cut. "Now please repeat, Mr. Beechum, so I've got it exactly right."

"All right," Hal said. "I'd made a bad shot into the woods where that shed was and saw her the instant I went in to look for the ball in those trees. I knew she was dead. I would have reported it immediately. But just then I saw this fellow coming down the last fairway. Well, I just put two and two together. He was obviously nervous, and I thought: Yes, sir, he's the one who did it. I hadn't

noticed him playing ahead of us before, you see. But when we approached that seventeenth tee, he obviously saw us coming. So he dragged her into the shed, hid her clubs in the brush and went ahead as though he were playing alone.

"Well, I said to myself, if he killed her and thinks I saw her in there, I'm in trouble. I may not be the bravest man in the world, but I try to use my head when the occasion calls for it. Act natural, I told myself. I saw my ball sitting on top of this golf cap, and I took a swing at it. Put it on the green, by the way. Then I just played the game out."

He smiled casually at a surprised Maury, then went on: "I holed out at seventy-nine. Then I went back up to that shed. The body was gone. Well, this fellow had been out of sight from the time we came around to the last tee, so apparently he hadn't holed out, after all. Instead he got into that shack and hid there while we played the last hole. When we got to the green; he carried her out, and off through the woods. There's a road that curves up around that last tee area. He put her near there. Then he came down to the parking lot after we'd left, got into his car and drove around to pick her up. Do you want to let me have one of your cigars, Maury?"

Looking bewildered, Maury handed him the cigar.

"But you still didn't report it," the detective said.

"I'll tell you why not," Hal said confidently, lighting the cigar. "You people would have gone right after him, right? That would have given him a chance to give you almost any kind of phoney story. But I decided he had a preconceived plan. Let him carry it out, I thought. Then he'd be stuck with it. That's the way it turned out."

"Would you describe him?"

"Mid-forties. About five-eleven. Greying brown hair. No cap when I saw him, but he picked that up after I'd hit my ball off it. Weighed about two hundred, I'd say. Wore a green windbreaker, tan slacks, brown shoes. Would that be your Mr. Robert A. Woodfellow?

WOODFELLOW sat in the room and gazed dolefully at his clasped hands. Maury still looked bewildered.

The detective said: "Do you want to tell us about it, Mr. Woodfellow?"

The man nodded. "I hadn't really planned anything definite," he said. "It crossed my mind, of course. You see, we had a season's rate. We could play every day, family-plan, and we were paid through the season. Trouble was I could get up here from San Francisco only maybe a day or two a week. She was staying here the whole time. Well, I got here yesterday, and we went out to play. She walked over to the first tee while I stepped in to register. The attendant was watching TV, and there was almost nobody else on the course. So I just signed my own name. I still hadn't planned anything definite—it was just something I did without thinking much about it." He fell silent.

"Do you want to go on?" the detective said.

"Well, there she was on the tee, swinging away, practicing, practicing. The whole thing was that I was the one who started up on golf about five years ago. Did me a lot of good. Really got my mind off things. The pro down in San Francisco said I showed a real potential. Had that extra something. Then she started." Again he fell silent.

"Mr. Woodfellow?" the detective asked.

"She took lessons. She bought special clubs. Practiced tirelessly every day. Practiced. Practiced. I had to be in an office most of the time. But she didn't. All she had to do was play, play, play—like her life depended upon it. When we rented this motel unit for the summer, she really went at it. Every day of every week!"

He rubbed his nose, then said: "I began to think about it on the tenth hole—really to think about it. She was five up on me by that time. On the seventeenth, she was ten up. She'd made a fool out of me, and I knew it. So on the last hole she had a second shot of two hundred and thirty yards to get on the green. She put it in the hole. I gave her a four wood in the back of the head. Then I saw them coming, dragged her into the shed and went back up to the tee like I was playing down the fairway alone. The rest of it was like he said—" His voice trailed away.

Maury cleared his throat and spoke for the first time: "Mind saying what kind of ball she was playing, Mr. Woodfellow?"

"Dagway two," he said.

IN THE station wagon, Hal Beechum said, "Shouldn't we see how the girls are doing first?"

Maury grimaced. "You know they're over there pulling those slot-machine handles anyway."

When Hal parked the car, Maury Elston got out and trotted toward the last green as Hal watched in surprise. Maury plunged into the marsh grass, and Hal suddenly tensed, understanding. Moments later, Maury straightened, crying out victoriously. He trotted back and held out a golf ball.

"Dagway two! *Your* ball! The one I took out of the cup was hers! That was no game at all! Cancelled! By default! You didn't break eighty, and you might as well admit it!"

Hal stared at him, blinking furiously. "I'll tell you something! If I hadn't run across her and got into all of that, I would have still succeeded in—"

"There's one way to prove it!"

"Yes, there is!" Hal shouted. "And I wonder if you want to put some money on it this time?"

"All you have to do is tell me how much!"

Hal strode to the back of the station wagon and slammed open the door. "I'll give you one little piece of advice, Maury. You're going to have to play over your head to stay with it today. Way over your head!"

FOR FASTER SERVICE—USE ZIP CODE NUMBERS! REMEMBER, ZIP NUMBERS ARE PART OF YOUR ADDRESS! AVOID LAST MINUTE RUSH! MAIL EARLY IN THE DAY! IT'S FASTER THAT WAY!

The Unnecessary Murder

It was the only natural TV outfit in the Miami–Pompano Bay area. But murder seemed the opposite of natural to Shayne.

by BRETT HALLIDAY

THE REHEARSAL HAD been under way for twenty minutes when the girl, following her cue, said shrilly, "He's in the next room, and if he comes in now he'll hurt you very badly."

"I'll take care of him," Keith Cord said, and whirled to the door.

Nothing happened!

According to the script, Sam Pender should have happened!

Keith Cord waited with fists ready, then let out a deep breath and turned to the right. At the far end of the bare room which had been turned into a rehearsal hall for the day, stood a five-foot-two harassed man holding the script in one hand.

"Well?" Cord asked tiredly. "Where is he?"

The little man called out, "Sam! Sam! You're on."

There was no response.

The girl, Joyce Shepperd, a pretty and garish-looking blonde who was wearing a two-piece bathing suit and sandals, looked irritable.

© 1965, by Brett Halliday

The new MIKE SHAYNE story

"Sam is probably looking over the house," she said. "He told our dear producer he'd like to buy it from him."

Keith Cord shouted at the harassed man, "Will you get hold of Sam Pender?"

The harassed man nodded and opened the door, then shouted and left the door open and walked to a long hall. At the far end was a staircase, which could be seen clearly from where Keith Cord was standing.

Keith Cord was a six-foot blond whose close-cropped, secret-agent type haircomb had been a factor in making the television show, *The Adventures of Kurt Kent,* so successful. A small-time actor who hadn't been doing too well in Hollywood or Broadway, he had attracted the attention of a T.V. packager named Ferrier Keene and, as the trade put it, both men rode to success on the Cord haircomb. The vein was apparently petering out now, because the show hadn't been as successful in the last few months as it had been during the two previous T.V. seasons.

The harassed man came back, shaking his head dubiously. He was Walt Lange, who directed the show, and was fond of saying that he was the only man connected with it who ever did any work.

"No sign of Sam," he reported. "Maybe he's helping Ferry Keene rig out the decorations for tomorrow night's party. He likes Ferry's parties as much as he likes Ferry's house."

"Sam is supposed to be here, right now," Keith Cord pointed out. "He has to come through the door on cue and charge at me, and I beat the living daylights out of him. It says so in what we laughingly call a script."

Walt Lange shrugged. Downstairs they could hear the sound of a hammer hitting against wood. The Friday night party at Ferrier Keene's home was going to be the producer's biggest since he had moved the show to Pompano Bay Beach in Florida, from California. It was fortunate that Keene was able to let the actors and directors use a relatively bare room of his home in order to rehearse an episode that was to be taped next week.

"I'll find him," Keith Cord said, his jaw jutting as aggressively as it did on the show.

The girl drawled. "Keith Cord handles the case again."

Cord said, "If I were handling the show, our rehearsals would go off a lot more efficiently."

Joyce Shepperd said lazily, "And you'd have the crime of the week solved in twelve minutes instead of eighteen, I suppose."

"I could solve some of those crimes on the show a lot faster than—oh, forget it, Joyce. I'm going to find Sam Pender."

Cord walked out the door.

Joyce Shepperd posed herself against a window, then decided that she didn't look languorous enough and glanced out at the quiet and exclusive district in which Ferrier Keene lived. Walt Lange made copious notes in the script.

When Keith Cord returned to the room, his face was gray and ashen. "He's at the foot of the steps," he said with difficulty. "Ice cold."

Joyce Shepperd said laughingly, "Another crime for the great Keith Cord to solve." Then she looked more closely at him and her eyes grew round with shock. "You're serious."

Walt Lange rushed out to the hall before Joyce Shepperd could get there. When she joined him, they stared down the curving staircase. Sam Pender, a huge man, lay with a hand on the bottom step and the other hand near the carving knife that had been planted in his stomach.

Keith Cord had come out slowly to join them. He was thoughtful. "I realize this is probably an awful thing for me to say—with Sam just killed. But think of what it would mean to the show if I could find out who did it. A cool million couldn't buy that kind of publicity."

Cord never forgave Joyce Shepperd for laughing mockingly. And Walt Lange stared at Cord in utter consternation, hardly believing he had heard the calloused remarks of the show's star.

TIM ROURKE sat thoughtfully at the farthest end of the bar. The *Miami Daily News* reporter scowled down at the drink in his hand, waiting expectantly for his companion to take his first sip of the cognac he had ordered.

"What's wrong, Tim?" Mike Shayne said when he had sipped and approved of the drink. "You asked me to get here in a helluva hurry. I haven't had my breakfast yet!"

"I've been asked to take on a job of special pleading," Tim Rourke said, still thoughtful. "Do you know about the Keith Cord T.V. show? They shoot it out at the Pompano Bay Beach studio that was built especially for them, and they're the only natural T.V. outfit this area can point to with pride, if that means anything. They've been around in Florida longer than Jackie Gleason."

"What about it?" Shayne asked, tugging at his left earlobe.

"Something pretty grim happened at a rehearsal yesterday. I thought you'd refer to it, but I guess you haven't read this morning's paper." Swiftly Rourke sketched in the details of Sam Pender's violent death. "The point is that Ferry Keene called the paper's publisher and suggested Mike Shayne might be the man to save his show for the area. We

don't want it to slip away to California or go off the air, if we can help it. Keene and the paper will take care of your fee. Can you go over and take a look at the situation?"

"Well—it's only a couple of hours' car ride," Shayne said, "and it's a nice day. I can decide better when I've had a talk with Keene and the others. I'll see Cord first, since he discovered Sam Pender's body."

Keith Cord lived in a comfortable ranch-style house at the southern end of Pompano Bay Beach. A young Negro houseboy led Shayne to a swimming pool shaped like Keith Cord's hairdo. Cord himself sat looking pensively at the pool.

At Shayne's entrance he rose to shake hands. "I recognize you. You're Mike Shayne! Keene told me you were on the case and were on your way and would see me first. What'll you have to drink, Shayne?"

Cord turned toward the houseboy. "Terry, a cognac for Mr. Shayne and the usual for me. Shayne, I've a suggestion I'd like to make that's so unusual I'm a little embarrassed to bring it up."

"I'll listen, at least," Shayne said. "That's what I came for. As a starter, I'd like for you to give me all the details of the murder, exactly as you remember it."

It didn't seem embarrassing as Cord told the story; only the usual painful and terrifying series of events so similar to many murders in Mike Shayne's experience. Keith Cord could have withstood pain and terror more easily than embarrassment, Shayne realized. Over the cognac, which was surprisingly second-rate in quality, he waited to hear why his host was embarrassed.

The full story came out slowly and haltingly.

"I suppose you know, Shayne, that our show, *The Adventures of Kurt Kent,* has had some rating trouble lately," Cord went on. "Of course it's all temporary, and I'm sure our new guest-star policy will do a lot to help. But some good publicity would be even more favorable. I'm sure you understand."

"I think so," Shayne said, nodding. "Go on."

"It occurred to me," Cord said, looking intently at Shayne's cognac glass, "that a good chance for publicity might be for me, Keith Cord, to solve Sam Pender's killing."

"I'm sure it would be," Shayne said. "But why was I called in, then?"

"To help me," Keith Cord said. "That is, I'm to more or less take charge and solve the case and you're to be in a—a consulting capacity."

Shayne, who'd had some previous experiences with the childlike minds of actors, told himself grim-

ly that they always managed to do something more foolish than they had done last time. He asked patiently, "What do you expect me to do?"

"Advise me on the right moves to make," Keith Cord said. "You know, like a technical consultant."

"It seems to me like you're a little mixed up between real life and television," Shayne remarked, standing up. "It's been a long drive and I'm in no mood to listen to any more of your foolishness. This is murder, and I've been asked in by Keene."

"Oh, okay," Cord said. He leaned forward. "How would it be, then, if you tell people that you're acting as a consultant, and when you've got the case solved you give me the information first. Then I give it to the police. And, of course, the newspapers."

Shayne realized Keith Cord lived in his own dream television-world, with absolutely—apparently—no sense of reality. He thought swiftly. He had come out here largely as a favor to Tim Rourke and he would go through with the case despite Keith Cord. He'd handled crazier guys before.

Shayne knew he'd gotten all he could, for the moment, from Keith Cord and was eager to get away. "We'll play it *my* way for a while," he said easily. "Though I want to caution you—this is for ***real*** and it isn't a small screen murder!"

"I can handle myself," Keith

Cord said, with a gesture of impatience.

"I'm going to have to talk to the people who were with you when you found the body," Shayne said briskly, to change the subject. "Will you phone Joyce Shepperd and tell her to expect me? And then you can give me her address. I doubt if I'd find her listed in the phone book."

JOYCE SHEPPERD kept a small apartment in the town proper, not too far from the golden and glittering main stem. The girl who played Keith Cord's secretary on the show was far removed in appearance and manner from the pert Lucy Hamilton, Shayne's secretary. She was a bright blonde who had been voted the best undressed star, and who emphasized near-nudity by her clothes and manner.

She was wearing a tennis outfit when she received Shayne in her brightly-lit apartment. With self-conscious strides she walked to the

sideboard and poured out a drink for herself, then glanced questioningly at Shayne.

"Cognac for mine, thanks," he said. He closed a massive hand around the drink after having sipped it, and with the free hand he put his panama hat on the dust-free cocktail table at his side.

"What do you want to know?" Joyce Shepperd managed to make the words sound like an invitation.

"First of all, tell me about how Sam Pender's body was found."

She complied, but her tone was just as sexy as it had been up till now. Her account wasn't at variance in any serious way with what Cord had said.

"Tell me something else, Miss Shepperd. Did you know Sam Pender at all well?"

"We were close friends, and had many a drink together from time to time. He was used on the show every so often as the menace for Keith to win a fight from. He was an ex-fighter with fine connections in Miami and he told me once that he knew Ned Tremont well enough to pay him money in person."

Shayne nodded. Ned Tremont was a power in the gambling world, a quiet man who said that he owned a piece of this and a piece of that. It was Ned Tremont, though, who was consulted before any of the well-known gambling powers made any major moves.

"Was he in debt to Ned Tremont at the time he died?"

"He never mentioned it to me," Joyce said. "Sam always figured that one of his gambles would come in big, and he'd have it made for life."

There was nothing more to be learned from Joyce Shepperd, Shayne decided. He stood up.

"I suppose the police have told you to keep yourself available and in town."

"I'm available, all right," she said with that lazy smile of hers.

"Thanks very much," Shayne said, putting the panama hat in place on his red head and getting up. "It's been a nice way to spend a few minutes."

MIKE SHYNAE was in the corridor of the apartment building when a small bullet-headed man approached him. The man looked Shayne up and down.

"Who are you?"

Shayne's gray eyes narrowed. "I might ask you that."

The bullet-headed man took out a wallet and opened it to show Shayne the badge pinned to its inside. "I was coming up to ask Miss Shepperd some further questions about a matter she's involved in, and there's something about your face that strikes me as familiar. You've had your picture in the papers and it was something to do with a crime."

Shayne pulled out his license

and showed it to the man. The man sighed, gave his name as Graff and his rank as Chief of Police at Pompano Bay Beach, and let Shayne have the license back.

"Private and out of Miami," he said. "You're a bit of a way from home grounds, and you'd be surprised how upset some of us get at the notion of private help from out of town."

Shayne tugged at his earlobe. "Too bad," he said mildly.

"What's more, I've heard about you from an old buddy of mine, and Peter Painter doesn't like you at all."

"Any friend of Petey's—" Shayne began mildly, and decided not to go on with it.

"So long, peeper, and you'd better hightail it back to Miami, if you know what's good for you," Chief of Police Graff said. "And stay there."

Shayne was aware of Graff's eyes following him as he walked to the elevator.

When Shayne got back to the motel he had checked into, recommended to him by Keith Cord, he phoned Ferris Keene to ask the T.V. producer to use his good offices in keeping the local police chief away from him. A few minutes after he had finished talking with Keene, the phone rang. It was Keith Cord, and he sounded like a man who had discovered gold. He had news for Shayne, he insisted.

"Shayne, I've done you a big favor," he said airily, "and saved you a lot of work."

"Your local police have been trying to save me work, too," Shayne said mildly. "I suppose you've found out who killed Pender and you want him arrested. Or her."

"I'm expecting a leading suspect to visit me in a few minutes," Cord told him. "You might want to have a few words with him."

"Who would that be?"

"Well, if you've been doing any work up till now, you may know that Pender was acquainted with and in debt to a very important man in Miami."

"Meaning Ned Tremont," Shayne said, and heard Cord draw a deep breath in surprise. "What does he want from you?"

"I want something from him," Cord said. "If you can come back to my place as soon as possible, you'll get the information."

"I'll be there in twenty minutes," Shayne said.

He took a shower and changed his clothes before making the trip to Cord's house. The Negro houseboy was apparently off for the evening; a smiling maid whose hair was nearly as red as Shayne's showed him into a book-filled library with a globe against one wall. Two tough-looking men stood impassively against the wall opposite, like breathing fixtures. On a comfortable chair and facing an

ill-at-ease Keith Cord, sat Ned Tremont.

"You'd be the peeper," Ned Tremont said with hardly a glance at Shayne. He was a chunky man with sleepy blue eyes. There wasn't a hair on his head. "Cord wants me to talk to you about Sam Pender, and I'm willing to do it to oblige him. He's a good customer out at one or two of the places I own a piece of around Miami and the Beach."

"All right," Shayne said equably. "Did Sam owe you much money before he got killed?"

Tremont raised a forefinger. One of the hoods said quietly, "Thirty-two grand." He stopped talking as soon as Tremont's forefinger was lowered.

"When did you expect him to pay up?"

Again the Tremont forefinger. The hood said, "One week from today. October Fourth—" He stopped when the forefinger descended.

Shayne asked, "How well did you know him?"

The hood waited for Tremont's signal, then said, "Pender got his start in this show on account of the boss. He was a broken-down pug, but the boss gave him money to get started and introduced him to Mr. Ferry Keene. He was doing pretty good."

The forefinger descended, and Tremont spoke personally. "He was a jackass. He talked about retiring, but he didn't have the money to do it."

" 'Retiring'?" Shayne raised his shaggy brows.

"He said he was on to a good investment, thanks to the show's producer."

Keith Cord took a hand in the conversation. "Ferrier Keene wouldn't give a man the right time, let alone a good investment tip. If he wasn't my producer and I didn't have to go to his party tonight, I'd spit in his eye over a telephone."

Shayne had noticed a sardonic undertone in the actor's voice when he used the word, *investment*. "Was Pender out to pull a crooked deal?" he asked.

"Of course." Tremont shrugged massively. "Sam Pender's idea of a good investment was to buy a deactivated submachine gun and have it re-activated again. Easiest thing in the world to do, if you know how. Sam found out how."

"Why did he tell you this?"

The Tremont forefinger soared again. The hood who answered some questions on demand said, "Pender wanted one of the boss' men to go with him for a night. He said it wouldn't involve much work, and it'd make a fortune. The boss refused to put anybody in Sam Pender's operation, whatever it might be."

Ned Tremont lowered the forefinger and said, "I've written off the thirty-two g's as a bad debt. I

might have known that some time Pender would welsh."

"One other thing." Shayne tugged thoughtfully at an earlobe. "Did he by any chance tell you he'd have the money in at an earlier time than you expected it?"

"Tomorrow, he said."

"I thought so." Shayne turned

to Keith Cord. "Are you going to that party in a little while?"

"You mean Ferry Keene's party?" Cord looked startled. "Why, yes."

"Fine, I'll go with you." Shayne smiled frostily. "I think it's going to be an interesting evening if there ever was one."

IN KEITH CORD'S car on the way to Keene's home, Shayne instructed the T.V. star to keep any cops on the scene busy and away from him. Cord agreed reluctantly. He would obviously have preferred to follow Shayne's movements.

Shayne's behavior wouldn't have been called instructive by any T.V. prototype. He sought out Ferrier Keene in his bedroom, and talked to the show's producer while the latter was busily removing a stain from his tuxedo. Keene was a small and perky man with a mustache of the type that Shayne thought had gone out with the Victorian era. It curled at the ends like a pair of noisemakers.

"I was glad when Tim Rourke called and told me you'd be on the case, Shayne. I asked for you. The paper's publisher is a good friend of mine. This is a bad mess —Pender's murder might be extremely bad for the show unless it is cleaned up quickly.

"Incidentally, Geraldine Alba, the temperamental Metropolitan opera diva, is coming down from Palm Beach with her boy friend, the shipping magnate. And she'll be complete with her fabulous jewels. She's also bringing about a half dozen friends with her." Keene was babbling irrelevantly. "She let me know only yesterday morning when I was talking to Joyce that she'd be here. Evidently she doesn't read the papers and I didn't want her to stay away—so I said nothing about the mess."

Shayne, however, kept to the point. "Has Sam Pender been showing curiosity about this house of yours, lately?"

"Yes, some nonsense about wanting to buy it." Keene didn't seem surprised at Shayne's appar-

ent knowledge. "I had to show him over the place several times."

As Keene left and started down the staircase, the one on which Pender's body had been found, Shayne walked at his side. "Did he tell his plans to anybody? His plans to buy your house, I mean?"

"To me, of course, but I don't think—" He broke off abruptly. "Here comes Keith. What's on his mind, do you suppose?"

Keith Cord was running toward Shayne. The redhead saw Chief Graff behind the T.V. star. Graff had spotted Shayne, and he was beginning to look angry.

"Shayne," Cord called out. "Do you know what Graff just told me? He said that Sam Pender had bought a gun. It was found in his rooms, and that means he had it in for somebody or he was going to—"

Cord stopped because of the interruption below.

Perhaps fifty people had been milling around in the large room at the foot of the staircase. The women were dressed expensively, the men were dressed well and quietly. There was a screen at one end of the room, and Shayne supposed that after the food and drinks, the lights would be lowered and some T.V. pilot films would be shown. The audience, if Shayne was any judge, would watch intently and criticize it among themselves only later on.

Two persons had unobtrusively walked into the room, each dressed in a black felt hat pulled down almost over the eyes, and a dark coat. Over their faces they wore black-edged handkerchiefs. Each carried a gun.

"Behave yourselves and you'll be all right," said one of them, who spoke with harsh assurance. "We're taking every man's wallet and every woman's jewels. Get on line facing the center of the room and hand the stuff over when we come to you."

From under the coat, the one who'd been speaking produced a sack and gave it to the other one, who stood in the center of the room and gestured the people on line to walk towards him. Apparently he had decided that a different method would be more convenient in getting hold of the loot.

Shayne was completely unprepared for Keith Cord's reaction. The T.V. detective inflated his chest and suddenly called out: "Stop that, you!"

Cord ran toward the two hoods. Shayne growled deep in his throat and hurried down the stairs. He was close to one of the hoods, the one who had spoken, but not close enough to keep the man from firing pointblank at Keith Cord.

Cord put up a hand to his shoulder. A look of surprise and bewilderment crossed his face. The men and women in the room gasped as Cord lost his balance and fell to the floor.

Shayne, unarmed and angry, struck out with a suddenly closed fist. The hood who had spoken was caught unawares and doubled up at the punch which caught him in the stomach. Shayne had reached out a hand to get the hood's automatic when he heard a shuffling noise back of him and felt metal descend viciously on his head.

He knew that the other hood had left his task and was joining with the first one to subdue him. He kept his balance and lunged, then realized that the hood who had spoken had darted quickly to one side. Metal struck him again just before darkness descended.

MIKE SHAYNE awoke slowly and painfully. He was lying stretched out at full length on a large bed. A doctor examined him thoroughly, made some comment about his constitution, and left. He glanced down at himself and realized that he was in pajamas.

Police Chief Graff rubbed his bullet-head briefly. He was sitting in the only chair in the room.

"The hoods got away and luckily for me, Geraldine Alba didn't come with her jewels after all," he said briskly. "By the way, Cord will be all right. He was taken home and kept saying he plans to solve the case."

Shayne smiled slightly.

"Incidentally, Shayne," Graff said quietly, "you saved his life. That louse with the gun would probably have pumped a few more bullets into him. He was getting ready to, I thought, when you jumped after him."

"That hood ought to have killed me and Cord, both," Shayne said. "I'm pretty sure I know who it is, and Cord may have figured out the answer, too."

He could hardly keep his eyes open and he went into a deep sleep before Graff could ask many more questions. It was daylight when he awoke. He was still in Ferrier Keene's bedroom, he realized. A maid brought breakfast. Shayne was getting dressed slowly but with increasing confidence when the door opened on Graff.

"Can you get down to the rumpus room?" Graff asked tiredly. "Your friend Cord has lost his mind completely."

Shayne asked politely, "Do you expect me to find it for him?"

"No, but I hope you can stop a free-for-all," Graff said. "Cord stayed here overnight. Now he's convinced he knows who the killer is and he's rounded up all the suspects. He says he'll get a confession before he's finished, and he wants you and me to hear how he does it."

Mike Shayne found Keith Cord on a rumpus room couch and staring from one face to another with a look of triumph in his eyes. His gaze passed from Ferrier Keene to Walt Lange and Joyce

Shepperd. Joyce, who had the evening before been dressed in a costume that looked like something out of a harem, was now dressed in more comfortable clothes.

Shayne, who had begun to wonder if the girl owned even one dress, decided that she looked well when she concealed her body, too.

"Glad you could make it," Keith Cord said. "Hope you haven't been hurt too badly. I wanted you and Graff here to see how well I have handled all of this. There are reporters waiting at the other wing of the house, and when an arrest is made they'll get the full story."

Shayne gestured wearily for him to go ahead and talk.

"We know that Sam Pender thought of a robbery scheme, and that the robbery was to take place at Ferry's party. But he was killed before he could do anything about it, and the person who killed him took over leadership in the robbery. Who was the person he was likely to talk to? Was it Ferry Keene, himself? I considered very carefully and —"

"Get to the point," Shayne said tiredly. "Who are you trying to tell us did the job?"

"Joyce Shepperd, of course," Keith Cord said triumphantly. "She can play tricks with her voice, heaven knows, and make it sound like a hood's. That's what gave me the idea last night. It was Joyce who shot me. The reason she and the man she hired wore black coats was simply to hide Joyce's figure. And there's one more clue that's a dead giveaway."

"Well?" Shayne sounded impatient, considering that he was hearing the solution to a murder.

"When I found Sam Pender's body and I came back to the room, I said, 'He's at the foot of the steps. Ice cold'."

"What about it?" Shayne asked.

"Joyce then said, 'Another crime for the great Keith Cord to solve'." Cord smiled. "How did she know it was a crime? I didn't say so."

He glanced at Shayne, waiting for approval.

But Shayne said mildly, "I can think of at least one explanation for that."

The condescension was wiped off Keith Cord's face. "You can?"

"She may simply have been saying in a joking way that for Sam not to be where you wanted him to be in itself constituted a crime. She may not have understood what you meant by saying that he was ice cold. It certainly is as possible as any other explanation."

Cord said sullenly, "You think you've got all the answers."

"Maybe one or two." Shayne's smile wasn't friendly. "I can think of at least one theory that fits the case every bit as well as your own

attempt to get Joyce Shepperd in trouble."

"Well?" It was Cord's turn to be impatient.

"Suppose there's an actor on a T.V. series that's having rating trouble," Shayne said. "He would want to get publicity, so he talks to a man who works on the show and has a friend with gambling connections. Between them, they arrange a robbery attempt that the star will foil and in doing it will get tremendous publicity."

Cord opened his mouth, but no words came out.

"But the other fellow—we're calling him Sam Pender—decides he wants more money or makes some impossible demand or other. The star of the show sticks a knife in Pender and solves the problem that way."

Cord said, "But you're wrong about that! Completely cock-eyed!" He couldn't have indicated more clearly that Shayne had been right in talking about the publicity angle.

Hastily he added, "And don't forget, Shayne, that I was shot during the robbery. I could have been killed."

And he gestured to the bandage on his shoulder, as if to indicate that it set the seal of proof on his story.

"That was the smartest pitch of all," Shayne said. "You were going to be a good citizen if you had to get killed for it. Only, of course,

you were perfectly safe all the time."

"But I wasn't, I tell you!" For a split-second, Shayne thought that the man was close to tears. "I was almost killed."

"All you had to do was hire two hoods, dress them in black coats and instruct one of them to shoot you in the shoulder. You wouldn't be hurt seriously, then."

"But I was moving all the time, Shayne!" If he hadn't been a skilled actor, no man could have doubted his sincerity. "I could very easily have been killed."

"Don't try to sell me a bill of goods," Shayne snapped, apparently avoiding the difficulty. "You had worked up the case against Joyce Shepperd in your mind, and you'd spring it at a time when you felt sure you'd get the maximum publicity as a good citizen. You didn't care at all about killing one man or ruining the career of one woman."

"Joyce's career is practically shot, anyway." It was an unfortunate choice of word and Cord

added hurriedly, "She's getting old for the near-nudie bits on the show, and she's been dragging the ratings down. Ferry has talked about easing her out of the show."

Shayne said, "Are you saying that justifies accusing her of murder, Cord?"

"I don't." Cord raised a hand to stop Shayne from continuing, and then winced as he realized that the hand hurt because of his shoulder wound. "Joyce is the one. Everything I said about her really fits. The black coat, the one remark too many, and the voice."

"I think," Shayne said, "we can settle it pretty quickly."

Joyce Shepperd shifted uncomfortably in her chair, a look of fright in her eyes. She had been relatively relaxed while Keith Cord accused her of murder, assault with intent to kill, and robbery. Now she actually flinched.

"You don't seriously think I did what he says?" she asked Shayne in that throaty voice.

"We can prove it one way or the other," Shayne said. "After Cord was shot, I punched the hood who had shot him. I hit him very hard and the blow landed in the stomach. If I'm not mistaken that hood's stomach should be pretty tender even yet."

Shayne stood up and approached Joyce Shepperd, glancing down at her dress.

"I had never seen you in a dress before, and you have a reputation for not wearing them. In fact you claim that you never wear them and you don't own many."

"That's just for publicity." Her voice wasn't it's usual seductive self this time. It had dropped a few tones, and was rather mannish.

Shayne glanced at Graff, and knew that the police chief, too, had been strongly reminded of the robber who had given spoken instruction to last night's crowd in the large room at the foot of the staircase.

"You voice is getting more familiar," Shayne said softly, and then took her by a hand. He stepped backwards, forcing her to get up. Gently, he touched her midriff through the dress. The sex-conscious girl winced and cried out in pain.

Shayne stepped aside. "I'm afraid Keith Cord is right in naming you as the murderer," he said. "Only he doesn't know why you killed Sam Pender. You were with Ferrier Keene when he talked to Geraldine Alba on the phone, and said she'd be at the party. You knew Cord was planning this publicity stunt of foiling a hold-up—if Cord himself didn't brag about it, your pal Pender certainly would.

"You went to Sam Pender and told him that here was a chance to make a fortune on the Alba jewels, simply by double-crossing Cord when he tried to do his publicity bit. Pender didn't mind the

money, but he evidently wouldn't take a chance at shooting at Cord. He was afraid he might kill him.

"When he told you he wouldn't do it and was going to tell Cord about you—in a fit of blind anger you knifed Pender. You then hired some ham actor you know to go along with you on the robbery. Geraldine Alba couldn't make it to the party after all, though you didn't know that. And you just haven't been very lucky. You'll be a lot less lucky when you get taken to a very warm chair one night, Joyce. Incidentally, Ned Tremont's still in town. It won't take Chief Graff long to find out you owe him more than Sam Pender did, and needed money desperately."

The hysterical girl rushed at Shayne, but Graff forced her hands down and clamped handcuffs on them. Shouting and cursing, Joyce Shepperd was led from the room by one of Graff's men.

"Talk about good publicity," Ferrier Keene said in awe after a moment's silence. "This will save the show for another season, at least. And you did solve it, Keith. You really did."

Cord nodded, but he was chastened now. His experience of the last half hour had frightened him and his manner clearly showed it.

"Why were you trying to implicate me, Shayne?" he asked. "You must have known I wasn't guilty. Why did you scare me?"

Mike Shayne looked at the actor. He'd had a hard day, and he'd be glad to get back to Miami and Lucy Hamilton and Tim Rourke and even Peter Painter. In Miami you didn't find people with no conception of the difference between the real world and television. People around *The Adventures of Kurt Kent* were a little different and a little strange, and Shayne knew he'd had enough of it to last him for a long time.

"I simply wanted to throw Joyce Shepperd off guard—and it worked. I also wanted you to realize that meddling with murder is no job for an amateur, no matter how lucky he gets." Mike Shayne tugged at his ear. "If it makes you feel any better, Cord, I was trying to do you a favor."

Mike Shayne turned to Chief Graff. "Let's call the reporters in; they must be impatient. And let Keith Cord have his moment of triumph."

A NEW COMPLETE MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET NEXT MONTH

A Chillingly Suspenseful POLICE FILES Novelet

KITCHEN KILL

There were three suspects in the slain girl's past and each had a convincing alibi. So the evidence had to be pieced together brilliantly.

by JONATHAN CRAIG

THE SQUEAL CAME in during my half of the watch, which automatically put me in charge. Stan Rayder and I followed the usual practice of detective teams in splitting our watch, so that one of us caught squeals for the first half and the other for the second. Ten minutes earlier and Stan would have been in charge. As it was he acted as my assistant and I was saddled with all the paper work.

I sent Stan to check out a Plymouth while I picked up a sixty-one from the desk officer in the muster room. A sixty-one is a regular Complaint Report Form, which is made out for all squeals. It is brief and undetailed, but it's the key document of all cases in the department files, and the basis on which everything else is built.

All we knew about the case at this time was that a woman had been asphyxiated by gas, and the address. When we arrived at the apartment building, two radio units were already there. We stationed patrolmen at the front and back entrances and sent a third through the building to tell the tenants to stay in their apartments and out of the halls until we could get to them.

The building was a four-story walkup, and the body was in the one nearest the stairway on the

© 1957, by Flying Eagles Publications, Inc. Reprinted by permission of the author and the author's agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

second floor. It looked like the kind of accidental death that could happen to almost anyone.

The girl lay on the studio couch, her arms straight down at her sides and one slim ankle crossed over the other, just as if she'd lain down for a nap. She was about nineteen, a small girl with long, beautiful legs and shoulder-length red hair that was not quite dark enough to be called auburn. She wore only a mistlike chemise and high-heeled pumps, and she had died slowly and painlessly, without even having realized that she was in danger.

The one-room apartment was small but expensively furnished; and the girl herself looked expensive, from the outsize diamond on her right hand to the hand-stitching on her custom-made pumps.

There was hardly any trace of the gas now, and although this was one of the coldest nights we'd had all year, the air in the room was beginning to warm up a little from the body heat of the three people who were there when we arrived.

Two of these were neighboring tenants wearing pajamas and robes. The third was the young man who had discovered the body, a big, bulky-shouldered fellow in his early twenties with glistening black hair and hot black eyes.

When I asked him his name, he said, "Jeff Hutchins," in a preoccupied sort of way, his eyes fixed on the body on the studio couch.

"Let's step out in the hall," I suggested, taking his elbow and motioning with my head at the two neighbor men to precede us.

Hutchins violently jerked his arm free and said belligerently, "Don't go pushing me around, copper!"

"We can talk better out of sight of the body," I said without anger.

"I'm not leaving Helen alone," he said. "We can talk right here."

I reached for his elbow again, he jerked it back and started to take a swing at me. I caught his wrist, swung him around, twisted his arm up behind his back and marched him into the hall on tiptoe.

The patrolman I had sent to tell tenants to stay in their apartments was just coming down the stairs. I said to him, "Put this guy in the squad car and stick with him until he cools off. I'll talk to him later."

I shoved Hutchins toward the patrolman. Apparently his tiptoe walk into the hall had already begun to cool him off, for he let the patrolman lead him down the stairs without objection.

A POLICEWOMAN named Sue Calman and an assistant M.E. came up the steps as the pair went down. I'd asked that a policewoman be sent over as we left the stationhouse, because I already knew then that the corpse was a woman,

and female DOA's can be searched only by a policewoman.

Motioning Sue and the assistant M.E. towards the open door of the apartment we had just left, I turned my attention toward the two pajama-and-robe-clad tenants.

Neither could tell me much except that the girl's name was Helen Campbell and that she lived alone. Both men lived on the same floor, and had been awakened by Jeff Hutchins yelling for help. They had run out into the hall at the same time, smelled the gas and had seen Hutchins lying collapsed in the open doorway to the dead girl's apartment.

One had dragged Hutchins into the hall, the other had thrown open windows in the apartment and had turned off the gas. Then he'd started to lift the girl, decided she was dead and left her where she was.

I sent both men back to their apartments; then Stan and I looked up the super. All we got from him was a verification that the girl's name was Helen Campbell, that she paid her rent promptly and that she'd never caused a disturbance of any kind.

We went back to the one-room apartment and made a complete search of it while Sue Calman and the assistant M.E. continued to work over the body. As I said previously, it looked like the kind of accidental death that could happen to anyone.

But it wasn't. Stan and I found enough during our preliminary search to convince us it was murder.

The lab crew arrived before we completed our search, but we were almost through and kept them waiting only about five minutes. When I had told them what I wanted in the way of photographs, I went over to see how Sue Calman and the assistant M.E. were coming.

Sue had completed her search and was writing data down on her search form.

"You find anything, Sue?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Where would I find it? The kid's got on a pair of shoes and a chemise. There's nothing in the shoes but the label, and nothing in the chemise but the girl." She glanced at the body disapprovingly. "As you can see."

"So that's what it is," Stan said. "A chemise. I never saw one before, outside of a store window."

Stan's a tall, studious-looking guy with a brush cut. He had a habitual expression of surprise, but it doesn't mean anything. He stopped being surprised by things a long time ago.

"Women don't wear them much any more," Sue said.

"Too bad," Stan said.

"It's the kind of thing men buy for women as gifts," Sue said. "About all they're good for is to

parade around in, or to stick in a drawer somewhere."

The Assistant M.E. closed the dead girl's eyes and turned to face me. "Pretty," he said. "Just to look at her, you'd say she was the picture of health."

I nodded. "No qusetion about it being the gas?"

"Very little, Pete. The odds would be about a thousand to one. That's where she gets that pink, healthy-looking skin, from the gas. When carbon monoxide combines with the hemoglobin in the red blood cells, it turns the blood a cherry red."

"But it's possible she could have died of something else?"

"It's conceivable, yes. Nothing's ever a hundred per cent certain until after the post-mortem."

"Suppose you were carrying the case," Stan said. "Then what?"

"If I were carrying the case, I'd forget any other possibilities. As I said, it's all but certain she died of asphyxia. Actually, that's a pretty broad term. No matter what one dies of, the real cause of death is always the failure of oxygen to reach the body tissues, particularly the brain."

"How about the time of death?" I asked. "Can you fix it for us?"

He looked at his watch. "It's a few minutes past five A.M. I'd say she hasn't been dead more than a couple of hours. Call it about three o'clock, and you'll be pretty close."

I wrote down the time in my notebook. "How long would it take her to die?" I asked. "I mean, once the gas was on."

He shrugged. "That's hard to tell, Pete. Normally death occurs when about fifty per cent of the red blood cells have been saturated by carbon monoxide. But that doesn't mean too much. You'd have to take into account the cubic feet of air in the room, and the rate of flow of the gas from the burner, and a lot of other things. And then too, if she was under the influence of a narcotic at the time the gas went on, her body wouldn't have required as much oxygen as it would have otherwise, and the saturation might have been as much as eighty per cent. The same thing would have been true if she'd been asleep."

"Any indication she was under the influence of a narcotic?"

"No. There are no needle punctures or anything like that. But that doesn't rule out the possibility. There again, we won't know till I post her."

"How about liquor?"

"Slight trace on the lips. She might have had an ounce, or a gallon. I'll run a test as soon as I get her to Bellevue."

"I think you're going to find out she was stoned," I said.

"Oh? Why so?"

"It figures," I said. "From the way the homicide was set up, she would have to be."

"I've been pretty busy with her, Pete. I heard you and Stan talking about it, but I really wasn't paying much attention. Just what do you think happened?"

I glanced over to where the techs and photographers were still working around the tiny kitchen area. There was a waist-high refrigerator with a two-burner gas plate on top of it, a small gate-leg dining table, and a sink with a food cabinet above it.

"Her killer had a pretty good imagination," I said. "He tried to rig it so it would look as if she'd put a pan of soup on the burner, and then gone to sleep while she waited for it to heat. The soup was supposed to have boiled over and put out the fire, and from then on it would have been just another case of accidental death."

"Did the soup actually put out the fire?"

"Yes. But it also clogged up the jets. It was this real thick minestrone, which is about three-fourths vegetables to begin with."

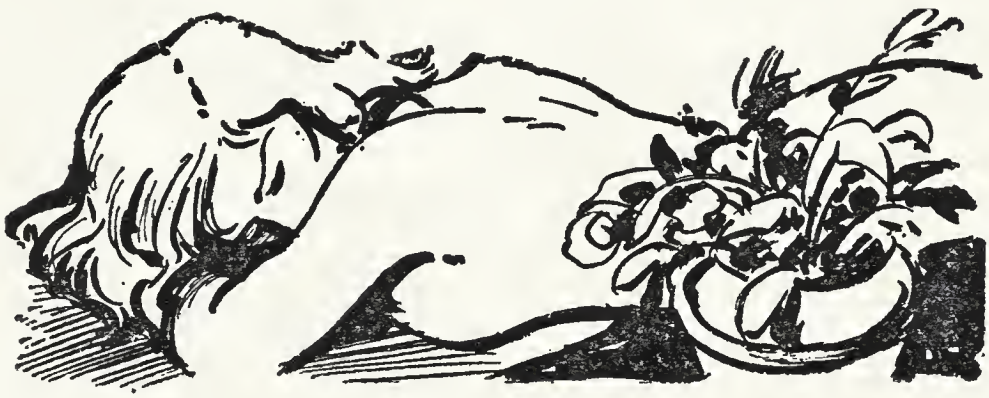
"I see. But wouldn't the pressure of the gas have forced the stuff off the jets?"

"Sure. But not soon enough to suit our guy."

"Assuming it *was* a guy," Stan put in.

I nodded. "Anyhow, he couldn't wait. When the soup clogged the jets, he tore off a piece of paper towel and wiped the stuff off of them. Not too much of it, you understand; just enough to let the gas out. He was so careful about it that Stan and I looked right at the burner for a couple of minutes before we realized what he'd done."

"We found the paper towel," Stan said. "The guy was so sure of himself that he just wadded it up and stuck it down in the bottom of the garbage. He probably figured nobody could make anything out of a little soup on a towel. He should've looked closer; he'd have



seen that he'd picked up a little rust and grease along with the soup."

The Assistant M.E. shook his head. "He couldn't have been very bright, could he?"

"A man's I.Q. hasn't got anything to do with the way he'll act when he's rigging a murder," I said. "If it did, we wouldn't solve as many of them as we do."

"There's more," Stan said. "He got too careful. He laid out a soup bowl and a box of soda crackers on the table, just the way the girl herself would probably have done. But he wasn't taking any chances. He wiped the bowl and the cracker box so clean that there isn't a single print on either one of them. There isn't even a smear.

"And even if you figured it was possible for the girl to take a clean bowl and put it on the table without leaving at least a couple of prints, you couldn't get around the cracker box. Think of the number of people who handled it before it ended up on her table."

The Assistant M.E. frowned thoughtfully. "I see what you mean. You reason that with the girl passed out on the couch, her killer could have taken all the time he needed to make her death look like an accident."

"He almost made it," Stan said. "He just got a little too cocky, and a little too careful. Trouble is, he got cocky and careful in the wrong places."

"We'll appreciate a fast p.m., doc," I said.

"You'll get it. All right to take the body now?"

"Yes. If you come up with anything, leave a message for us at the squad room."

"Will do," he said.

One of the techs said, "All clear back here, Pete."

Stan and I walked back to the kitchen area. While we'd already examined it, we'd had to go easy for fear of smearing fingerprints. Now that the techs were finished, we gave it a more thorough going over.

THE CABINET above the sink contained a sufficient variety of liquor and wines and fancy glasses to stock a small bar; there were even a few kinds of beverages and glasses that I'd never seen before. The refrigerator contained an assortment of limes and oranges and fruit juices, a dozen or so bottles of soda and tonic and ginger ale, a huge orchid in a transparent plastic box, and nothing else.

On the table, near the soup bowl and the box of crackers, there was a small bottle of instant coffee and a cup and saucer. Both the bottle of coffee and the china had yielded prints, but the techs had already established the fact that they belonged to the dead girl.

"Nothing interesting except that orchid," Stan said, shutting the refrigerator door. "And even that

doesn't mean much. It's been in there at least a week or more. She probably put it in there and forgot it. And besides, it came from one of the biggest florists in New York. They probably sell a couple of hundred of them a day."

I nodded. "Maybe you'd better give the place still another going-over, Stan," I said. "Her boy friend ought to have cooled off by now. I'm going down to see what he has to say for himself."

I went down the stairs and out to the Plymouth at the curb, and told the patrolman I'd assigned to keep an eye on Jeff Hutchins that he could go off somewhere and sneak a smoke for himself. Then I climbed into the back seat with the young man.

"I'm Detective Peter Selby, Hutchins," I said. "I'll be in charge of this case from here on in. You think you've calmed down a little by now?"

He seemed to have. He sat slumped in the seat, his eyes fixed broodingly on the hands folded in his lap.

"I'm sorry about that," he said. "I just blew up, that's all. It was just such a hell of a jolt I didn't even know what the devil I was doing."

"Happens all the time," I said. "Suppose you give it another try. Let's start with how you happened to find the body."

He let his breath out heavily. "We had a late date. For three-thirty. I just walked in and found her."

"The door was unlocked?"

"I have keys to both the outside front door and the door to her apartment." He fished in his pocket for a key ring and removed two keys from it. "Here," he said, handing them to me. "Just in case you want to see if they work."

"You say you had a late date," I said. "You mean she was out with somebody else earlier in the evening?"

"Yes. That is, she had a date with somebody earlier. I don't know whether she went out with him or not. Maybe he just came over to the apartment."

"All right. Go on."

"She said to make it about three-thirty. That's when I got there, at three-thirty."

"Exactly?"

"Yes. I guess I was pretty anxious. I hit it right on the nose."

"How's it happen you didn't buzz her from downstairs?" I asked. "How'd you know the other man wouldn't still be there?"

"I didn't give a damn if he was. If he was still there, she'd just have to get rid of him, that's all."

"You've got a pretty fair temper there, Hutchins."

"Don't get me wrong. I just don't like being pushed around. You're a pretty big man yourself; you know how it is."

"You knock at her door?"

"There's a bell. I started to ring,

and then I smelled the gas. I thought I'd never get my key into that damned lock, but I did, and . . . and I saw her lying there on the couch, and all that gas hit me right in the face and I almost keeled over. I yanked the door open all the way and ran inside and opened the window, and then I started to drag her out into the hall, but all of a sudden I got so sick to my stomach that all I could do was yell for help and sort of crumple up on the floor."

"You didn't touch anything in the apartment?"

"I never even got within three feet of her. That gas turned my stomach inside out, and—"

"I didn't mean just the girl. You touch anything else?"

"No. How could I? I never had a chance. A couple of guys in pajamas came rushing in, and one of them dragged me out in the hall. I tried to yell to the other one to do the same thing with Helen, but he went all to pieces. Just kept running back and forth like an old woman. The guy that dragged me out started back for her, but the gas was almost all gone by then, and he said he thought she was dead and that it'd be better not to touch her until the police came."

"What happened then?"

"Nothing. I was still too sick to move, and I guess nobody else could think of anything to do. But somebody must have called for the cops or an ambulance, because you guys started pouring in there only a couple or three minutes after that guy dragged me out in the hall."

"How's your stomach feel now?"

"Physically I'm okay; it's my nerves that's giving me fits." Suddenly he covered his face with his hands and shook his head slowly from side to side. "Why would she do it?" he said. "She had everything. She was so damn beautiful and all—why would she kill herself?"

"What makes you think she killed herself?" I asked.

He glanced up at me sharply. "You mean she didn't? It was an accident?"

There are times when you can't tell whether you're dealing with a killer, or with a guy with a broken heart, and sometimes it's tough to know just how to play it. But you have to play it one way or the other; there's nothing in between.

"You think you could take another jolt?" I asked.

"Like what?"

"It wasn't any accident, Hutchins. She was murdered."

I was watching his face closely for reaction, but it showed me nothing I wouldn't normally expect to see.

"Murdered?" he said, his voice barely audible. "Helen was murdered?"

I nodded. "And rigged to look like an accident."

He moistened his lips, his eyes

wide. "Murdered," he whispered. "*Helen,* was murdered . . ."

I leaned back and lit a cigar and studied him in the pale flat light of the early dawn. Hutchins' shoulders shook, as if he'd just become aware of how cold it was.

"I was crazy about her," he said, almost matter-of-factly. "I didn't kill her, Selby. I couldn't have. I couldn't even have touched her, no matter what she'd done."

"Somebody did," I said. "Maybe you can help us find out who it was. But first we have to start with you. After all, you're the one who found her." I paused. "You say you got here at three-thirty. Where were you before then?"

"I was home."

"For how long?"

"All night. I mean from eight o'clock on, till I left for here."

"Can you prove it?"

"How could I prove it? I live alone, in a brownstone. I read until about eleven, and then I set the alarm for three and went to sleep."

"You didn't see or talk to anybody between eight and the time you got here?"

"No. Listen, Selby, I know how you guys think, but—"

"Take it easy," I said. "You don't know how we think. Just concentrate on giving me a picture of this girl. You know of any enemies she had? Can you think of anyone who might have killed her?"

He was silent for a long time. "No," he said at last.

"She ever mention any threats?"

"No."

"Not even any arguments with anyone?"

"Well, not arguments exactly. She and Betty had a few words once, before Betty moved out. But it didn't amount to anything."

"Betty?"

"Betty Dolan. She used to be Helen's roommate, but she moved out a couple of weeks ago. No; it's been longer. About a month."

"Why?"

"Oh . . . Well, I guess you'd say it was over me. I used to go with Betty, see. And then, when Helen moved in—well, I guess I just couldn't help myself. I'd never seen anybody so beautiful in my whole life."

I asked him for Betty Dolan's

address and wrote it in my notebook. "Anyone else?" I asked.

"No. And if you think Betty did it, you're crazy. She just isn't the type."

"They never are," I said. "What'd Helen do for a living, Hutchins?"

"Nothing. She had some kind of private income. It wasn't any fortune, but she didn't have to work. I think her folks left her some dough in trust or something."

"She have any family? We'll want to notify the next of kin."

"No family. That much I know for sure."

"You know the name of this man she had a date with last night —the one she expected to be with up until about three-thirty?"

"She didn't say. But I think it might have been somebody named Charles Grantson."

"You don't know him?"

"No. But she's been seeing him quite a bit."

"What'd she tell you about him?"

"Not much. Somehow I got the impression he's married, but that's just about all. She never talked much about anybody. Oh, she mentioned this Ted Joyner now and then, but—"

"Who's he? "

"Some guy that used to be in vaudeville or radio or something. I never did get it straight. Anyhow, she'd known him a long time, from the way she talked."

I knocked the ash off my cigar. "Think hard, Hutchins," I said. "The more you tell us, the easier it's going to be—for all of us."

"I know," he said quietly. "My God, I know."

I talked to him another ten minutes without learning anything more of importance; then I called the patrolman back to the car and went upstairs again to use the phone.

My first call was to the Bureau of Criminal Identification to ask for checks on Helen Campbell, Jeff Hutchins, Betty Dolan, Charles Grantson, and Ted Joyner. Then, while I waited for BCI to complete its search and call me back, I phoned the squad room to report Stan's and my progress to the squad commander and to ask whether there had been any arrests or unusual happenings that might possibly have a bearing on our investigation.

There had been no developments of any interest; and a few moments after I hung up BCI called back to report that there was no criminal record on any of the people I had asked about, and that no information had ever been filed on any of them.

I located the addresses of Charles Grantson and Ted Joyner in the dead girl's personal telephone directory and entered them in my notebook beneath the address Jeff Hutchins had given me for Betty Dolan.

Then, after leaving Stan Rayder in charge of the investigation at the apartment, I took Jeff Hutchins to the Twentieth Precinct stationhouse, booked him as a material witness, and set out to question Grantson, Joyner, and Betty Dolan, in that order.

CHARLES GRANTSON, already a very warm suspect, turned into an even warmer one when I learned that he and his wife had checked out of their hotel at two A.M. Grantson had left no forwarding address, and the desk clerk told me that he and his wife had seemed to be extremely upset about something. The clerk was able to tell me nothing more about them than they were both attractive people in their late fifties, and that Grantson appeared to have a great deal of money.

Grantson's description, as given to me by the clerk, was that of a tall, slightly stout man with graying hair and very piercing blue eyes. After I had checked with the bellhop who had helped the Grantsons pack, and with the attendant at the garage where Grantson kept his Cadillac, I gathered from the remarks passed between Grantson and his wife that they had been planning on leaving the city.

I called Communications, gave them Grantson's description and license number, and asked that he be picked up for questioning. The alarm would be broadcast throughout thirteen states and the District of Columbia, and relayed to every station, post and precinct in the city, including a call to Stan and the other police at Helen Campbell's apartment.

There was, at the moment, nothing more I could do about Mr. Grantson. I went out to the Plymouth and drove over to see Ted Joyner.

Joyner turned out to be a small, stooped man of about forty-five with thinning blond hair and alert gray eyes behind shell-rimmed glasses. His apartment was furnished with an eye to bachelor comfort, and against the wall opposite the hall door was one of the most intricate-looking hi-fi outfits I had ever seen.

His expression scarcely changed at all when I told him of Helen's death, but I got the impression that he was making an intense effort to mask his emotions. He was silent for a long moment, and then sank down on the sectional sofa and rested his elbows on his knees, his face almost completely blank.

"A waste," he said. "Such a terrible, terrible waste."

"What was your relationship with her, Mr. Joyner?"

"If you're implying what I think you're implying, I suggest you speak with my doctor. He'll tell you my health has been so poor these last few years that . . ." He shrugged. "We were friends. Noth-

ing more. I met her when she first came to New York. You may have heard me on the radio, even in these days of television. I'm one of the original disc jockeys, you know."

I didn't, but I nodded anyhow.

"I still manage to hang on. A relic of a happier day, you might say."

"You meet Helen through your work, Mr. Joyner?"

"Yes. When her parents died a couple of years ago, she came to New York. It was an old, old story. She wanted to break into entertainment. She was willing to do anything. She had beauty, but no talent. Finally she began making the rounds of the studios, trying to find office work of some kind, even as a messenger. It happens I receive a great deal of correspondence, and I hired her to help me with it."

"Was she still working for you?"

"No. She quit after about four months. I understood she came into some money, but she was never very explicit about it."

"But you continued to see her?"

"Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that she continued to see me. She was, after all, a very young girl, and her parents were dead. I was extremely fond of her, and I suppose she sensed it, the way girls will, and felt that I was someone to come to when she was troubled or perplexed. I don't much relish the idea of being a father-image, or surrogate, or whatever, but I guess that's exactly what I was."

"When's the last time you saw her, Mr. Joyner?"

"About—well, I'd say about a month. Perhaps six weeks."

"She have any particular problem at that time? Anything that might have a bearing on her death?"

"No. That is, nothing at all serious. She seemed to be having a little trouble with her roommate over some young man, but I'm sure that—"

"She give you the details?"

"No. She merely said that her roommate's young man was showing a lot of interest in her, and that her roommate didn't like it. Betty something-or-other. I understood she was quite bitter about it."

"You know a man named Charles Grantson?"

"Grantson? . . . Charles Grantson. . . . No, I don't think I do." He paused. "Such a terrible waste. Helen was only nineteen, you know. A mere baby."

Another half-hour with Ted Joyner brought me no more than I knew already. I arranged for a police cruiser to take him to the Bellevue morgue for an official identification of Helen's body, and then I left to question her ex-roommate, Betty Dolan.

Betty lived in a small, shabby

sleeping room on the third floor of a rundown brownstone. The air had an unwashed, spilled-whiskey smell, and neither the room nor the girl appeared to have been cleaned up in some time. But despite her disheveled, lackluster blonde hair and a face that was obviously in need of a little soap and water, Betty Dolan was a strikingly beautiful girl. She had dark green eyes and tiny facial features, and the body beneath the soiled yellow wrapper was small-waisted and lushly curved.

"So Helen's dead," she said, her voice caressing the words. "Well, wonderful. It couldn't have happened to a bitchier girl." She sank down on the rumpled bed, reached beneath it for the fifth of whiskey that sat on the floor, and tilted the bottle to her lips.

"That's the first honest-to-God good news I've had this winter." She put the bottle back on the floor, brushed the dull yellow hair back from her forehead and eyed me narrowly. "So?"

"I understand you and she had some pretty hot words."

"Damn right we did. I got her told, and told hard. The red-haired slut cut me out with my boy friend."

"With Jeff Hutchins?"

"Yeah. With Jeff. God damn him. God damn *all* of them. They'll do you dirty every time."

"When's the last time you saw Helen?"

"Four or five weeks ago. When I moved out on her. Why? You think I'd be nuts enough to kill her lover, a big talking, on-the-make heel like Jeff? I'm glad she's dead, sure. Look, I'm laughing out loud. But if you think I killed her, you got rocks, boy."

She reached for the bottle again, then changed her mind and sat staring at me for a long moment. "It's Jeff you want," she said. "She had it coming and he gave it to her. Now if only somebody would give the same thing to him, I could die happy."

"What makes you think it was Jeff?"

"Because she ditched him for somebody else. She gave him the same brush he gave me. He's a natural-born flip, that Jeff. He just couldn't take it."

"Who was the other man?"

"Some old character named Charles Grantson. A goaty old joker with half a million bucks and a wife with a face that would bust a clock. Helen had been playing him for a long time, but she didn't give Jeff the bad news till the guy said he was going to divorce his wife and marry her. Naturally a guy like Jeff Hutchins doesn't stack up against any half a million coconuts, so Jeff got his little pink slip."

I determined that Betty had no alibi for the time in question, told her to keep herself available until she heard from me again, and then drove back to the station-

house for another talk with Jeff Hutchins. Either Betty Dolan had been lying, or Jeff had been holding out on me, and I meant to find out which.

IN THE SQUAD room again, I found a message on my call spike to phone Stan Rayder at Helen Campbell's apartment. I called him, and learned that Charles Grantson had come to the apartment and that Stan had taken him into custody. He had told Stan that he had seen Helen the night before, had drunk with her in the apartment until about eleven o'clock, and had then gone home to his wife. He and Helen had argued about Grantson's decision not to divorce his wife after all, and Helen had threatned to tell Mrs. Grantson of their affair unless Grantson came up with a considerable sum of money. Grantson, so he said, had refused, and had thought he might escape further trouble with Helen by getting his wife out of town immediately.

He had therefore told his wife that they had to leave for Florida at once, to take care of an emergency connected with one of Grantson's business interests there, and that it would be well to leave in the early morning hours in order to avoid the heavy traffic of the metropolitan area. Mrs. Grantson had been reluctant to go on such short notice, but she had finally agreed, and they had started south. However, once Grantson had had time to think things out a little more claerly, he had decided to return to New York, have another talk with Helen, and if possible get her to accept a lesser sum for her silence.

I didn't think much of Grantson's story, and I told Stan to keep

him in custody until I had finished talking to Jeff Hutchins, at which time I would go to Helen Campbell's apartment and interrogate Grantson at length.

My second talk with Jeff Hutchins was a waste of time. He had once again become surly and uncooperative, and beyond insisting upon his innocence and calling Betty Dolan a liar, he refused to say anything at all. Finally I gave up, turned him over to the squad commander for further questioning, and headed for the dead girl's apartment.

I never reached it. On the way, I stopped for a sandwich and a cup of coffee; and because of that stop I came to realize something that should have occurred to both Stan and me the first moment we looked into Helen Campbell's food cabinet and refrigerator.

I had bolted half the sandwich and was taking a last sip of the coffee when I suddenly found myself reflecting on the fact that, barring oranges and limes, neither the cabinet nor the refrigerator had contained any food of any kind whatever. Liquor and mixer, yes—and a great deal of it. But no food. The oranges and limes had undoubtedly been meant as ingredients and trimmings for mixed drinks, not as food. There hadn't even been a loaf of bread or a bottle of milk.

And now that my thinking processes had finally become unfrozen, I recalled that the only cooking utensil she had possessed had been the small stewpan which she had obviously used to heat water for instant coffee.

And if Helen never cooked anything at home—never even kept so much as a single slice of bread or a single pat of butter—how had she happened to have a can of minestrone and a full box of soda crackers?

It was, of course, still possible that she *had* just happened to have them on hand. But I didn't think so. I thought the chances were more than good that the soup and crackers had been bought and taken to her apartment for the express purpose of rigging a murder to look like a suicide.

And I reasoned further that, since the soup and crackers would have been bought at an hour when all the grocery stores and most of the delicatessens were closed, the number of places where such a purchase could have been made were few and the probability of the customer's being remembered were good.

I decided that Helen's killer would have been in a hurry, and that he would have bought his necessities at the nearest possible place.

The nearest possible place to the girl's apartment house was a hole-in-the-wall delicatessen. The proprietor told me he closed at ten P.M., that he had sold no mine-

strone the previous evening, and that the only delicatessen he knew of that remained open after ten was on a side street two blocks away.

I drove there—and learned the identity of Helen Campbell's killer. The proprietor had sold a can of soup and a box of crackers at about twelve-thirty the previous night, and the description he gave me of the purchaser could have belonged to none other than Ted Joyner, the radio disc jockey for whom Helen had worked for a few months when she had been trying to break into the entertainment field.

I phoned Stan Rayder to tell him I would pick him up outside Helen's apartment house.

HALF AN HOUR later Ted Joyner motioned Stan and me to seats on his sectional sofa and sat down in a deep leather chair across from us. He looked very small sitting there, and somehow very sick and very old. The gray eyes behind the shell-rimmed glasses looked less alert, less alive.

"Well?" he said softly. "Well, gentlemen?"

"Did you have your own keys, Mr. Joyner?" I asked.

"Keys?"

"To Helen's apartment. We were wondering how you got in."

He shook his head slowly, trying to smile questioningly without quite being able to bring it off. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"It's just a matter of time," I said. "You can make things a lot more pleasant for yourself if you don't prolong this."

"I still don't under—"

"We have witnesses, Mr. Joyner. Three of them. An old man who couldn't sleep. He saw you go into Helen's building. And two kids. They were in the back seat a car, where they shouldn't have been. The cop on post gave them a reading-out. This morning, when he heard about the murder, he remembered the kids. We've just talked to them. They were having their fun right across the street from Helen's building. They saw you too, Joyner."

Joyner's face was gray. He stared at me unblinkingly.

"So much for the witnesses," I said. "But we have more."

The witnesses had gone down better than I had expected, considering that I had invented them on the spur of the moment. I had, of course, needed a little extra shock insurance to go with the knowledge we actually had.

"We know when and where you bought the soup and crackers," I said. "We know exactly how you rigged Helen's murder, Joyner. We've got everything we need, and we know everything we want to know—except why."

Joyner sat so still, so completely without expression, that it was hard to believe he was still alive.

A full minute passed, then another, and slowly his eyes clouded and grew moist.

"I gave her everything," he said, his voice so low that Stan and I had to lean forward to hear him. "I loved her from the first moment I saw her. I gave her a job, and when she got tired of working I kept right on paying her—every dollar I could. I—I liked to buy her nice things. She was just like some kind of beautiful doll, and I liked to dress her up and show her things to make her laugh."

Stan started to say something but I caught his eye and shook my head.

"I never cared for anyone before. I was afraid to give love because I feared I'd be laughed at . . . I was afraid I'd be hurt. But I loved Helen. She was all the world to me. Nothing else mattered at all. And then, when she met this man—this Charles Grantson—she threw me away as if I were filth.

"She wanted to marry Grantson, to marry his money. She didn't want me around any longer. She couldn't stand the sight of me."

He was silent for several moments. At last I said, "Go on, Mr. Joyner."

"What is there to say? I decided that if I couldn't keep her for my own, no one else would ever have her at all. I went over to her apartment to plead with her one last time. I could see the light under her door, and when she didn't let me in, I thought it was because she didn't want to see me. I let myself in. She—she was on the couch, passed out, the way she had been so many times lately. I sat there holding her in my arms for a long, long time . . . and at last I knew what I had to do."

"Had to?" I asked gently.

He nodded. "Yes. Helen belonged to me. I couldn't have borne it knowing she belonged to somebody else."

I glanced at Stan and then walked to the phone to arrange for the immediate release of Jeff Hutchins and Charles Grantson.

As I waited for someone to answer the phone in the squad room I heard Joyner sobbing softly.

"Can't you understand, Officer?" he said to Stan Rayder. "Can't you understand that I had to?"

THE ONLY MAGAZINE featuring MIKE SHAYNE every month

Featuring

MR. MEI WONG

THE HORSES OF TANG

by DAN ROSS

The murder seemed the work of a clumsy thief. But Wong thought otherwise.

IT WAS A strange sight. The portly old art dealer, Mei Wong, and the black-bearded Inspector of the Bombay police both on their knees studying some broken fragments of clay that were strewn on the thick, crimson carpet.

Inspector Bannerjee sighed and raised his turbanned head to look at Mei Wong. "All the king's horses and all the king's men," he quoted solemnly and shrugged. "This statuette is beyond repair. The shot that killed Rawlings destroyed it as well."

The proprietor of the Bombay Art and Curio shop nodded in agreement. "What you say is all too true. The Tang Horse was worth a small fortune."

The tall, swarthy Inspector rose to his feet. "You sold the matching statuettes to Rawlings?"

"Yes. It was the work of several years finding them." Mei Wong's broad face was shadowed as he stood up, a squat old man in a rumpled linen suit.

"I assume Rawlings had them well insured?" The Inspector suggested.

Mei Wong spread his hands in a gesture of hoplessness. "Insured, yes," he said. "But no money will ever replace the broken figure." He turned to study the remaining statuette, which was still in its place on the narrow wall shelf—a graceful figure of a saddled horse with one leg lifted high in a paw-

ing moment, its long mane flowing.

Inspector Bannerjee said, "It was foolish for Rawlings to put them out in the open on that shelf. It was an invitation for robbery and murder which someone finally accepted."

At the mention of murder Mei Wong's eyes left the statuette to fix their attention on an inert body on the carpet beside the desk. A sheet had hastily been thrown over the dead Rawlings but he could still picture the clenched hands and startled expression of the murdered man.

"Yet there was no robbery," he commented quietly. "At least none that you have been able to ascertain."

The tall Inspector shrugged. "No doubt whoever it was lost his nerve." He pointed to the broken fragments of the statuette on the floor. "I think the killer knew the value of this piece, and seeing it destroyed upset him."

"If you consider the motive robbery." Mei Wong's broad face regarded him gravely.

"What other motive?" Inspector Bannerjee asked.

Mei Wong glanced around the rich study with its luxurious carpet, period furnishings and many precious antiques in china, brass and jade. He said, "Rawlings will leave a large estate. Who are the direct heirs?"

"There are three," the Inspector said. "Two nephews and a niece. One of the nephews and the girl were in the house when it happened."

"I see," Mei Wong said softly. "And yet no one heard the shot fired that killed Rawlings?"

"The servants quarters are far in the rear," the Inspector said. "The two young people were upstairs in their rooms, a good distance from here. Would you like to talk with them?"

"It might prove interesting," Mei Wong said. "I'd like to ask them several questions concerning their late Uncle's collection."

A FEW MINUTES later Inspector Bannerjee led Mei Wong into the living room where the two young people sat on a divan together, waiting. At their entrance the young man immediately jumped up in anger. He was blond with a crew cut.

"How long do you expect to keep us here?" he demanded. "She has a bad headache. She should go to her room."

Inspector Bannerjee nodded his agreement. "In a moment, young man," he said. "This is Thomas Bradley, the nephew of whom I spoke," he told Mei Wong, "and this is Lucille Rawlings."

"I knew your late Uncle very well," Mei Wong told the two. "You have my deep sympathy in this moment of violence and sorrow."

The girl, who was also blonde, and pretty as well, lifted her face to look at the plump Mei Wong with serious eyes. "Surely the police will find out who did it."

Inspector Bannerjee said, "We will need all the help you can give us. Have you any suggestions as to who might have done it? Is there anyone who might have had a grudge against your uncle? Anyone who recently had a quarrel with him?"

The young man and the girl exchanged a swift meaningful look. And then his face a burning crimson, Tom Bradley spoke, "I did. Uncle and I had a regular row last night before I went upstairs."

"Just before the murder," Inspector Bannerjee prompted him meaningly.

"If you want to put it that way," Tom Bradley said. He glanced at the floor as he answered in a sullen voice.

"But he didn't do it," Lucille Rawlings cried. She sprang to her feet in protest.

Mei Wong smiled at her sadly. "You seem so sure."

She hesitated and bit her lips. "I mean I'd have heard him if he'd come down. My room is near his."

Inspector Bannerjee addressed the young man. "What did you quarrel about?"

"My Uncle had given a promotion in the business to Ralph, my cousin. I thought it should have gone to me. I told him so."

Mei Wong said, "What was your Uncle's reaction?"

Bradley looked at him. "He said he'd think about it. But he was always putting me off that way. I became angry and accused him of unfairness. He said I didn't know what I was talking about and I went upstairs."

"I see," Mei Wong said, "and what about this Ralph. Where is he?"

"He's been in Singapore for the past week on company business," Bradley said. "We've wired him about what's happened and he's due back on the evening plane."

Mei Wong glanced at Inspector Bannerjee. "I should like to talk to that young man when he arrives," he said. "Could you visit my office with him?"

"I'm going to the airport to meet him," Inspector Bannerjee said. "We could stop by your place on the way here."

"Fine." The old art dealer nodded, and to the two young people he said, "We will be meeting again, I'm sure."

IT WAS CLOSE to seven that evening when the Inspector came to Mei Wong's studio in the Empire Hotel with young Ralph Rawlings at his side. The art dealer was seated behind his broad mahogany desk as they entered and he rose to greet them with a smile.

"How kind of you to indulge an old man's whim," he told Ralph.

"I was only too happy," the young man said quietly. "I know you were a good friend of my uncle's." He was slender, and had dark, curly hair.

Mei Wong waved them to chairs and resumed his seat behind the desk. "It is a sad business," he said, studying the young man. "You were in Singapore when it happened?"

The young man nodded. "Yes. I wish I hadn't gone. It might have been different."

"But both your other cousins were with him," Mei Wong said. "Surely your presence was not needed."

Ralph Rawlings scowled. "They've been hanging around Uncle for only one thing—what they could get out of him."

Inspector Bannerjee glanced at the young man sharply. "Are you saying you suspect them of being mixed up in the business of your uncle's murder?"

The young man's face became pale. "I didn't say that."

"But you hinted it," Mei Wong pointed out. "There was a nasty complication to your Uncle's death. One of his priceless art pieces was destroyed. You may remember the Tang Horses?"

Ralph Rawlings leaned forward. "But of course! They're worth a fortune. Clay statuettes with the horses facing each other as they paw the air. Were they both broken?"

"Just one," Mei Wong said and then paused. "I find it extremely strange that you can picture them so accurately."

The dark young man smiled thinly. "Not difficult, Mr. Wong. They were very unusual and my uncle had them just behind his desk on the shelf that ran along the wall. I've seen them there often."

Mei Wong rose and looked at the young man accusingly. "You have seen them there, certainly. But not often. You see I sold them to your Uncle only three days before his murder. And that was several days after you had gone on to Singapore."

"What are you suggesting?" Ralph Rawlings sprang hastily to his feet.

The old art dealer glanced at Bannerjee who had also risen. "I think if you check the various airlines carefully, Inspector, you will find that our young friend returned here for a swift, secret visit. Just enough time to murder his uncle. In these days of jet flights such a trip would be quite easily managed."

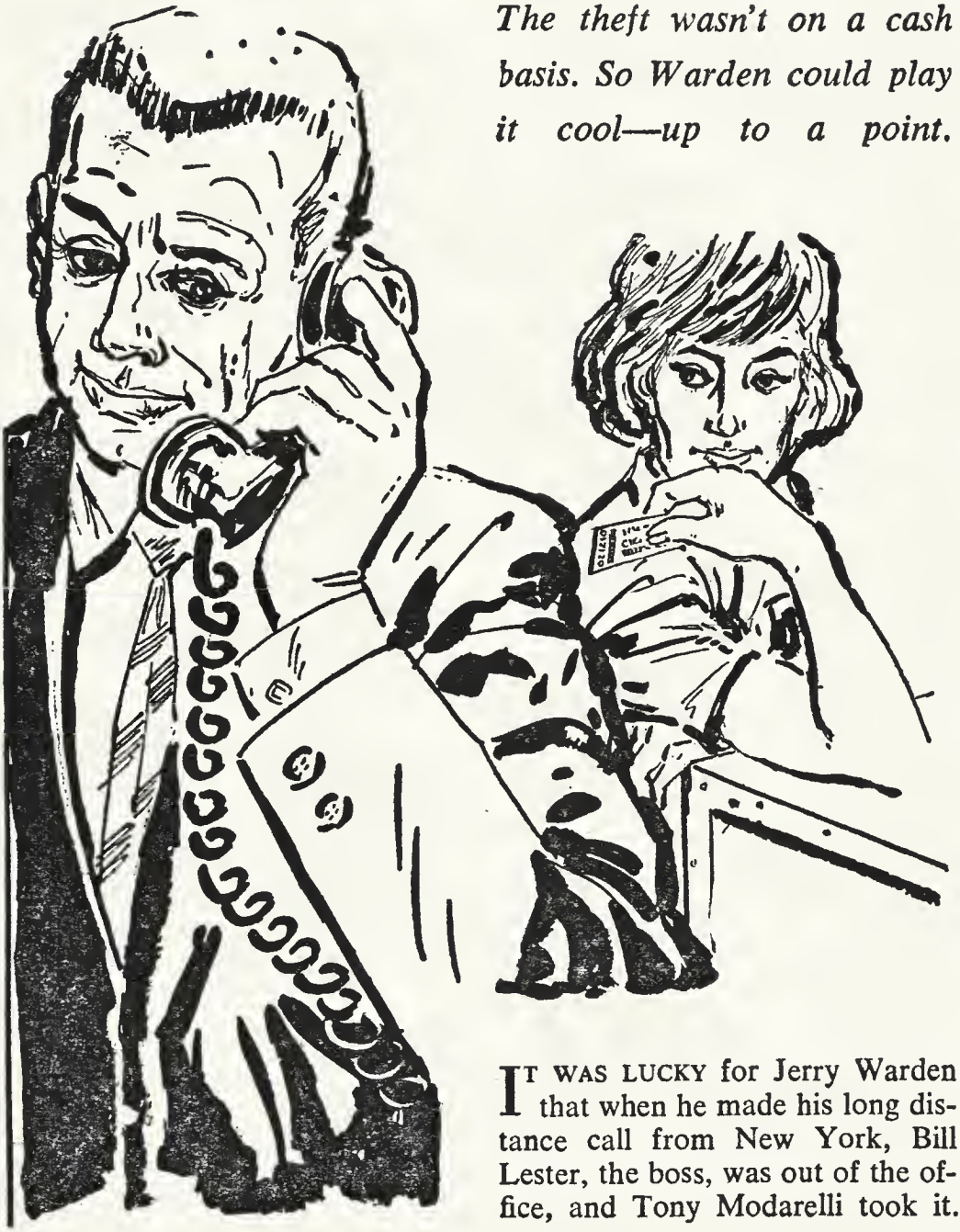
Ralph Rawlings slumped brokenly into his chair. "I misunderstood you. I didn't realize what you were talking about. I—"

The venerable Mr. Wong stood at Rawlings' side. "You knew entirely too well," he said. "Knowing about the horses gave you away. You can't alibi that."

Let the Credit Go

by JAMES HOLDING

The theft wasn't on a cash basis. So Warden could play it cool—up to a point.



IT WAS LUCKY for Jerry Warden that when he made his long distance call from New York, Bill Lester, the boss, was out of the office, and Tony Modarelli took it.

That is, it was lucky for Jerry if you consider getting married to a well-stacked blonde lucky—and if you consider living the life of Riley with her for over a month lucky. On the other hand, maybe Jerry himself would consider it a very *unlucky* chance, now that he has been forcibly separated from the society of honest men for awhile.

Either way, it was Modarelli who answered the phone in St. Louis and took Jerry at his word, whereas Lester, being of a more suspicious nature, would certainly have checked the records meticulously before making the address change.

Not that Modarelli was careless or anything. He told Jerry at once that they'd have to have confirmation in writing.

But that's the middle of the story, really.

It started when Jerry dropped into a Broadway cafe for a cup of coffee one evening in March and was served by a blonde waitress named Rhoda with a tip-tilted nose, wise blue eyes, and a million-dollar figure which she threw around with considerable verve while serving him his coffee.

Jerry was a dead pigeon instantly. He had always been a sucker for tip-tilted noses and blue eyes, and the biggest sucker of all for sensational female figures. You can see why he was immediately attracted to Rhoda—all his preferences wrapped up in one package.

They exchanged only the formal words of waitress and customer that first night. But before the week was out, Jerry was meeting Rhoda when she got off work and taking her to late spots for a drink and a dance before seeing her home.

Rhoda liked everything about Jerry almost as much as Jerry liked everything about her. She liked his tall slender build, his careless clothes, the way his hair stuck up like a wire brush all over his crewcut head, and his adoring manner toward her. To receive respectful adulation from a man instead of the rough passes she was used to, was not only new to her, but infinitely pleasing.

Only one thing about Jerry bothered her, and made her say "no" when he asked her humbly to marry him. This one consideration outweighed all the favorable factors she readily admitted seeing in him. It was important to her—very important. Money. Rhoda had a warm child-like regard for it. She needed it, lots of it. And Jerry had hardly any of it. So she turned Jerry down.

And that's probably the only reason Jerry Warden undertook the Crime he had been thinking about for a long time—to get money and the good things of life for Rhoda. For Jerry wasn't basically a criminal at all. Just easy-

going and inclined to cut a few corners—not out of viciousness but laziness. He was weak, yes. But he wouldn't have hurt anyone for the world. And he'd probably never have gone ahead with his Crime if he hadn't had Rhoda's affectionate encouragement.

The subject of the Crime came up naturally after Rhoda rejected his proposal of marriage.

"But why won't you marry me, Rhoda?" Jerry asked, enormously crestfallen.

"I love you, Jerry," Rhoda answered sadly. "But you don't have enough dough."

"I got a decent job," Jerry protested, "brings me in sixty a week, often more. Add that to what you make at your cafe—"

Rhoda shook her head decidedly. "Not enough," she said. She wasn't one to beat about the bush. "I want to live high, wide and handsome when I marry, Jerry. I want to really swing! No work, lots of clothes, travel, a swell car, eat in fancy restaurants instead of that crummy cafe I work in now."

"But Rhoda," Jerry argued, desperate, "if you'd only be willing to wait a little while, I could give you all those things you want."

This was the measure of Jerry's fierce devotion to Rhoda—that he would so quickly unveil as a stated promise something he had heretofore merely dreamed of timidly as a remote, unlikely possibility.

"You?" Rhoda asked, raising her blonde eyebrows in surprise. "You could give me all those things? On sixty skins a week? Are you cracking up, darling?"

"No," returned Jerry seriously, "but I got this idea, see . . ." and he told her about the Crime.

She was entranced, ineluctably attracted by the rosy future he envisioned for her. So with no allusions, ladylike but false, to her tender conscience or her outraged honesty, Rhoda hastened in her direct fashion to encourage Jerry in his project. "Great!" she said, squeezing his hand for emphasis. "What a marvelous idea, Jerry! Of course I'll marry you if you can take care of me as good as that!" And she kissed him to seal the bargain—a real pulse-raiser.

After that, it only remained for Jerry to put his Crime into operation.

He was a bellboy in a large midtown hotel. As such, he was familiar with the ways of transient guests, with the behavior of business men attending conventions, and with the pecadillos of out-of-town salesmen and buyers, in town briefly on expense accounts. In fact, his close observation of these types was what first gave him his do-it-yourself idea for easy Crime. And now that he was committed to the primrose path, his job in the hotel enabled him to proceed along it at a brisk pace.

His first move was to mark down a suitable victim. This he accomplished in a five-minute survey of the hotel dining room. The victim he selected was sitting alone at a small table. To Jerry's certain knowledge, he was staying at the hotel (Jerry had carried his bag, adorned with a Kansas City address tag, up to room 719 earlier). And above all, he proved to be possessed of the prime requisite of a suitable victim—the right Credit Card. International.

Seeing him present this potent evidence of affluence to his waiter when the check was offered and sign with a flourish for a fifteen dollar dinner, Jerry knew he was about to be in business. For the International Credit Card was good for everything from restaurant meals and black undies to airplane tickets and hotel bills.

A perfect victim. He knew the man's name from the room clerk's slip—Mr. Goodberry. He knew Mr. Goodberry was staying alone in a single room. And later, when he saw Mr. Goodberry go sleepily up to bed, alone in the elevator, Jerry knew that Mr. Goodberry would be sleeping alone, too. And that seemed a good omen, somehow, a sort of tacit blessing on his enterprise.

Jerry was on night turn that week. It was no trick at all to find an excuse to visit the seventh floor of the hotel about three A.M. The girl at the night desk around the corner from the elevators was dozing. Outside the door of 719 Jerry listened intently for a moment with his ear against the door panel. He was reassured by the sound of gentle snores emanating from his intended victim's room. He therefore quietly opened the door with a master key he had artfully obtained from the assistant-manager's desk shortly before, and entered the darkened bedchamber of Mr. Amos L. Goodberry.

True to the audible evidence, Mr. Goodberry was sound asleep, a small, innocuous-looking man in the big bed. Jerry stepped as lightly as a waiter with sore feet to the Swedish modern dresser. There, by the dim light seeping in from the corridor, he saw that Mr. Goodberry's wallet was lying conveniently to hand on the dresser top beside a ring of keys, a penknife and some loose change.

Jerry picked up the wallet. He retreated into the corridor, and closed Mr. Goodberry's door behind him, leaving it unlocked. He checked the girl at the night desk. She was still dozing. Then he withdrew to the solarium beside the elevator bay and proceeded to arm himself from Mr. Goodberry's wallet with the implements of Crime.

He manfully refrained from taking any of the currency stuffed into the long crease of the wallet. He was slightly tempted by it—

but only slightly. He told himself with a smile that he was shooting at bigger game than that. Rhoda! So he contented himself with extracting the International Credit Card from Mr. Goodberry's wallet and painstakingly copying from it on a scrap of paper Mr. Goodberry's home address, the credit card number, and the address and telephone number of International's headquarters office in St. Louis, which he discovered in the four-point type on the back of the card.

Then, on a piece of onionskin paper laid over the card, he precisely traced Mr. Goodberry's signature with a soft pencil.

All this took him less than two minutes. He saw no one during the course of his labors. No one saw him. Not even an elevator rose or sank in the elevator shafts nearby.

Silently he replaced the credit card in Goodberry's wallet. The traced signature and other notes he put in his own pants' pocket. Then he boldly re-entered the room of the still-sleeping Mr. Goodberry and put the wallet back on the dresser exactly where he'd found it. Before he left the room and delicately re-locked the door behind him, he tipped a small salute of thanks to Mr. Goodberry's reclining figure.

The next day at one o'clock he took a seat at the counter of Rhoda's cafe and ordered coffee. Rhoda came down the counter and served him herself.

Along with his coffee order, he gave her a meaningful look and slowly nodded his head.

"Already" she asked incredulously. "So soon?"

"Nothing to it," he said. "A breeze. Now will you marry me?"

She was cautious. "Not yet." She kept her voice to a whisper, although the cafe counter was deserted except for Jerry. "I will, after you're sure it'll work."

"That'll be this afternoon, baby," said Jerry confidently. "Let's get our blood tests. Believe me, I've thought this thing out carefully."

"I know," she said dubiously, "but are you sure this is better than just taking a credit card and using it quick?"

"Rhoda," he explained patiently, "this is much better. Look. A guy finds his credit card has been lifted, what does he do? Calls the house dick. Right? He calls the police. Then he calls credit card headquarters and cancels the card because it's been stolen. Everybody's alerted. Everybody knows some jerk who's after a fast ride has swiped Goodberry's credit card, number so and so. Right?"

"Is that his name?" asked Rhoda, fascinated. "Goodberry?"

Jerry grinned. "Isn't that a laugh? So about the second time I try to use that credit card, Rhoda, the cops or the FBI or

somebody puts the arm on me. Right or wrong?"

Rhoda looked at him admiringly. "You know more about it than I do," she said.

Jerry was gratified. Praise from his woman. He preened a little. "This way," he went on with the air of a man who is a top expert in his field, "old Goodberry doesn't even know somebody else is using his credit card. He doesn't cancel it. He doesn't yell copper. Because he's got right there in his wallet the only legitimate exclusive credit card issued in his name. That's what he thinks he's got. Only he hasn't. We have it, my love!"

"It's kinda thrilling when you say 'we' that way, Jerry," said Rhoda. "This afternoon, huh?"

He finished his coffee at a gulp. "You bet, baby," he said. "No reason why it shouldn't work. No reason at all. And we'll have plenty of time to swing to your heart's content before we fly to Mexico or Brazil or someplace. I guarantee it."

He left her with her eyes full of dreams.

Jerry felt pretty excited himself. He found a telephone in his hotel where he couldn't be overheard, and called the headquarters office of the International Credit Card Company in St. Louis.

That's the call that Tony Modarelli took because his boss, Bill Lester, was out of the office, remember?

Anyway, Modarelli picked up the phone and it was Jerry calling. Only Jerry said he was Mr. Amos L. Goodberry calling from New York.

"Yes, Mr. Goodberry, what's the beef?" asked Tony, who had once been a bartender. Then he quickly modified his greeting. "I mean, what can we do for you, sir?"

Jerry said, "I'm a holder of your International Credit Card, and I want you to change my address in your records and issue me a new card, okay? I've moved to the big town, New York." Jerry looked at the data he had copied from Mr. Goodberry's card. "My card is—" He read off the number 463-115-710-1. "Amos L. Goodberry," he added. "You got that?"

"Yes, Mr. Goodberry. What's your new address?"

Jerry gave him the address of Rhoda's walk-up apartment which she shared with three other waitresses over on the west side. "How long before you can send me my new card?" he asked.

Modarelli said, "It shouldn't be long. Couple, three days. You know how lousy the mail service is."

"Send it airmail," Jerry said, speaking with new-found authority.

"Okay. But we'll have to have

written confirmation first, of course. You understand that, Mr. Goodberry."

"Written confirmation?" Jerry pretended surprise. "How's that?'

"Routine precaution," Modarelli said. "We've got to be sure it's you, Mr. Goodberry, that we're talking to right now, and not some jerk who's stolen Mr. Goodberry's card."

"Oh, I see," Jerry said. "Well, I'm me, all right, set your mind at rest." He laughed thinly. "I'll drop you a note right away. Airmail special. But don't hold up my new card any longer than necessary, huh?"

"We won't."

"Is it okay to use my present card in the meanwhile?"

"Why not? Sure. I'll personally watch for your letter, Mr. Goodberry, and have the new card all set to shoot out to you right away."

"Thanks," said Jerry. "Thanks a lot."

He sat down and wrote the note as soon as he hung up, signing it with a very passable forgery of Mr. Goodberry's flowing signature, taken from his tracing paper.

After mailing this misleading missive, he reported to Rhoda. His jubilant account of his recent activities so pleased her that she promised to marry him as soon as they could get their blood tests and a license.

She quit her job that night, got a permanent wave next day as a kind of warming-up exercise, then sat around her apartment in a glow of excitement waiting to intercept the postman when he should bring a letter for Mr. Goodberry at that address. She was to explain to him (Jerry's orders) that the letter was for her uncle, who currently was using her apartment as an accommodation address.

Four days later, when the credit card arrived with new address as specified, but with the same old reliable name of Amos L. Goodberry gracing it, Jerry and Rhoda had been married for seventeen hours.

Jerry was deliriously happy with his blonde, tip-tilted, blue-eyed, well-stacked wife. But Rhoda remained a trifle wary and preoccupied until the credit card arrived. Then she, too, knew complete happiness.

At once, she and Jerry began a spending spree that must have established something of a record even in the credit card field. They bought clothes, liquor, gourmet meals as though there would be no tomorrow. They moved into a de luxe suite in a swank hotel across from Central Park. They acquired a bone-white Jaguar convertible that only a movie cowboy and Rhoda could love.

They became nightly visitors to the most expensive night clubs the city could boast. From day's be-

ginning to night's end, there was never an instant when Jerry and Rhoda weren't replete with fine food, fine wine, fine entertainment, or all three. And Jerry signed so many dinner checks and sales slips with the flowing, credit-card signature of Amos L. Goodberry that he felt he almost was Mr. Goodberry.

After several weeks of this sybaritic life, Jerry suggested that it would be wise for them to drift westward soon. They should leave New York, he said, and cross the country from coast to coast in style and prosperity, before they prudently took permanent flight from the U.S.A. to some far clime where extradition treaties were unknown. Rhoda agreed with alacrity. After all, she said, travel was one of the things Jerry had promised her.

First, though, Jerry said they needed some cash. Credit is great, he explained to his bride, but you need a little hard stuff occasionally for operating expenses such as tips and gambling. So he proceeded to raise several thousand dollars in cash by a simple but ingenious expedient that would have occurred only to a former bellboy.

Using his credit card, he obtained fifty first class airplane tickets to Houston, Texas, for Friday night. He knew that a convention of Texas oil industry men at his old hotel was ending Friday afternoon. Then, through his former bell captain, who was glad to cooperate for a century note, Jerry let it be known that any Texas conventioneer who wanted to fly home at once and couldn't get a reservation, could buy first class transportation from a certain Jerry Warden—for cash! —at a ten percent discount from the regular rates.

Thus, he and Rhoda were able to leave New York the next day in a manner befitting those who have cash as well as credit.

They drove westward in their white Jaguar, enjoying the scenery and the credit extended to them along the way. They hadn't a care in the world. Jerry knew that his eye-popping chits were being received by International Credit Card Company which, in a few days, would mail his monthly statement to him for payment at Rhoda's old apartment in New York. "Mr. Goodberry's" whopping bill might go back to International with the notation 'Unknown at this Address'. Or better yet, it might lie forgotten for weeks at Rhoda's old home, unpaid and gathering dust, a source of gossip for Rhoda's old roommates. In the meantime, the real Mr. Goodberry might use his original credit card a few times, but so what? It should be a good thirty days before International *or* Mr. Goodberry tumbled to the fact that they were being conned, and *do* something about it.

So Jerry and Rhoda dawdled pleasantly along, in no hurry to fly the country, thoroughly relaxed and happy in their private little credit-card Utopia.

They got as far as Salt Lake City, Utah, when Utopia collapsed.

On the third of May, as he signed Mr. Goodberry's name to a hotel bill, Jerry Warden felt an official hand on his shoulder. He disappears from this story abruptly at that point.

No doubt he is still wondering, in the cellblock or exercise yard, what went wrong? How could his sure-fire, innocent little Crime have fallen flat on its face so damn *quick?*

That's where his telephone call to St. Louis comes in again. The one that Tony Modarelli took, remember?

Mr. Bill Lester, Modarelli's boss, was checking over the April statements before mailing them out to International Credit Card holders, when he happened, purely by chance, to notice the staggering amount of credit Mr. Amos L. Goodberry had managed to run through in less than thirty days. He tensed like a pointing bird dog and said to his assistant, "Brother! This fellow Goodberry really laid it on us this momth, didn't he?"

Modarelli shrugged. "Moved to New York," he said without interest. "More of the action there."

"I guess so," said Lester, yawning, not really concerned. "But this is sure a heap of living for one little month! He must have bought himself a new stomach, new kidneys, and a new girl friend somewhere—on credit, of course." Lester snickered.

Modarelli grinned. "You're jealous."

"Could be. Where'd he live before?"

"Kansas City, I think. There's a couple of charges there, made on his old card."

Lester nodded. "Kansas City. Bet he never went hog wild like this in Kansas City, did he?"

"How should I know?"

"Lets take a look," said Lester, his suspicious nature coming to the fore. "Just for fun."

"If it's fun we're after," said Modarelli sourly, "I'll take the kind Mr. Goodberry seems to be having."

Lester got Goodberry's file out of the cabinets across the room, came back to his desk and leafed through the documents it contained.

Idly, Modarelli said, "When Goodberry called me from New

York about his change of address, he sure sounded awfully anxious to get started living it up in New York."

Lester raised his head and stiffened like a man who has just felt a gun in his ribs. "What's that? He telephoned you?"

"Yeah," said Modarelli. "You were out of the office at the time."

Lester grabbed the phone on his desk. "Get me Security!" he yelled into it. Then, "Send out a general alert, Joe, right away, on a Mr. Amos L. Goodberry, card number—" He read off the nine digits rapidly. "Whoever's using that card is a crook! Hold him! What's that? Yes, of course I'm sure! I'll send you down his statement, it'll help you catch up with him, maybe. Mostly New York, but then it starts west. Get going!" He slammed up the receiver.

Modarelli was regarding him with amazement. "What's got into you, old buddy?"

"Did you check Goodberry's file when he phoned you?" Lester was contemptuous.

"Sure."

"Carefully?"

"I didn't check what Sunday School he attended as a kid, or what color his eyes were, if that's what you mean," said Modarelli defensively.

"You should have!"

"Why?"

"He telephoned you," Lester said. "That's why."

"I don't get it."

"It's right here in the file, on his original application. The guy you talked to on the phone *had* to be a phony."

"I still don't get it."

Bill Lester said savagely, "The genuine Mr. Goodberry was born without vocal cords. He's a mute."

Only Sixty Days to Wait for the Redhead's Greatest Adventure

THE SPY THAT WAS MIKE SHAYNE

Shayne walks head on into an espionage trap with almost fatal consequences.

By BRETT HALLIDAY

(Continuec
Other S.

Get 9 ERLE STANLEY GARDNER Bafflers plus 2 MORE thrilling New Mysteries for only $1.00

The Case of the Troubled Trustee
CUT THIN TO WIN
The Case of the HORRIFIED HEIRS
UP FOR GRABS
The Case of the PHANTOM FORTUNE
Fish Or Cut Bait
The Case of the DARING DIVORCEE
TRY ANYTHING ONCE
Mystercuse and Mystercuse
The Waiting Game

GET READY for thrilling courtroom action . . . hair-raising suspense . . . smashing climaxes! You get ALL THIS on this great mystery offer: FIVE Perry Mason thrillers by Erle Stanley Gardner — FOUR Donald Lam — Bertha Cool mysteries, written by Gardner under the name "A. A. Fair" — and TWO MORE top-notch new mysteries! They'd cost you $37.95 in their original editions — but you get them NOW *for only $1.00* — to dramatize the many advantages of membership in The Detective Book Club.

The Best NEW Mysteries — For LESS than 97¢ each!

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop" — by outstanding authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, A. A. Fair, Mignon G. Eberhart, John Creasey and Van Wyck Mason. ALL THESE and many other famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many are members themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them complete in one handsomely bound Triple Volume (a $10.50 to $11.85 value in publishers' editions) for ONLY $2.89.

Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview" which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume before or after receiving it. NO money in advance; NO membership fee. You may cancel membership any time.

SEND NO MONEY

Mail Postcard for ALL 5 Volumes

Simply mail postcard promptly and we will send you at once the NINE complete Erle Stanley Gardner stories — PLUS TWO MORE exciting mysteries — all described on the other side. But don't delay. Mail postcard NOW to:

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I., New York 11576

SEND NO MONEY—JUST MAIL THIS POSTCARD A94-281

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB HS
Roslyn, L. I., New York 11576

Please enroll me as a member and send me at once the FOUR double-length, hard-bound editions of Perry Mason & A. A. Fair thrillers, PLUS the brand-new 3-in-1 volume Club selection containing another Perry Mason and 2 other great mysteries. I enclose NO MONEY IN ADVANCE; within a week after receiving my books, I will either return them all and owe nothing, or keep ALL FIVE volumes, containing ELEVEN first-rate mystery stories, for the special new-member introductory price of ONLY $1.00 (plus a few cents mailing charge).

As a member, I am to receive advance descriptions of all future selections, but am not obligated to buy any. For each future Triple Volume I decide to keep, I will send you only $2.89 (plus a few cents mailing charges). I may reject any volume before or after I receive it, and I may cancel my membership at any time. *(Books shipped in U.S.A. only.)*

Mr.
Mrs. } .....
Miss
(Please Print Plainly)

Address.....

City.....State..... ZIP CODE ZONE NO.

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR ELEVEN MYSTERIES

●

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

GRIPPING COURTROOM DRAMA! DARING CRIMINALS! BR: CTIVES!

TAKE THESE 11 THRILLING MYSTERIES including 9 ERLE STANLEY GARDNER Greats

LE STANLEY GARDNER
orld's No. 1
stery Writer

$7.00 in pub. eds.

$7.00 in pub. eds.

$7.00 in pub. eds.

$6.45 in pub. eds.

WORTH $37.95 in Pub. Orig. Eds.

Yours FOR ONLY $1.00 (As a new member)

You Get 4 **PERRY MASON** Thrillers and 4 Donald Lam — Bertha Cool Hits all by GARDNER in 4 Hard-Bound 2-in-1 Volumes

1 **The Case of the TROUBLED TRUSTEE**
Perry's client had the chance to KILL! Soon he'll have the CHAIR—*unless . . .*

2 **CUT THIN TO WIN**
Donald Lam gives a woman $10,000 for an "accident" that now looks like an ALIBI FOR MURDER!

3 **The Case of the HORRIFIED HEIRS**
Perry's client only met Mrs. Trent once. But — SOMEONE WANTS TO MURDER THEM BOTH!

4 **UP FOR GRABS**
Nurse Doon is *frightened . . .* because *she* KNOWS the patient who left was DEAD!

5 **The Case of the PHANTOM FORTUNE**
Perry is forced to defend *himself* against a charge of *framing an attempted MURDER!*

6 **FISH OR CUT BAIT**
WHO DRUGGED BERTHA COOL? *Not* the woman who made all those threats. SHE'S being *murdered!*

7 **The Case of the DARING DIVORCEE**
A suspected *murder* weapon *disappears* — and the D.A. threatens *Perry with San Quentin!*

8 **TRY ANYTHING ONCE**
Donald Lam CAN'T RESIST $2,000 — for spending *just one night* in a MOTEL!

AND

You Also Get This 3-in-1 Volume containing GARDNER'S latest **Perry Mason** plus 2 new hits by other famous mystery writers!

$10.50 in pub. eds.

9 **The Case of the BEAUTIFUL BEGGAR**
by Erle Stanley Gardner
WHO gains *most* from Daphne's murder? Wait a minute, Perry! Daphne seems to be making a *drastic recovery!*

10 **MYSTERIOUSER AND MYSTERIOUSER**
by George Bagby
A mysterious photograph, an attempted *kidnaping*, TWO men MURDERED! And now *you're next!*

11 **THE WAITING GAME**
by Patrick Wayland
There's a "bug" under your coffee table, Nicolson! You're *on the spot* — playing for keeps. *DEAD KEEPS!*

(Continued on Other Side)

Postage Will be Paid by Addressee

No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL
First Class Permit No. 47 — Roslyn, N. Y.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I.
New York 11576